

# Gender-based violence: Relevance for fisheries practitioners

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## Abstract

Attention to human dimensions of capture fisheries involves understanding how harms and benefits are experienced and distributed among different groups or people. Yet, not all harms are well understood or adequately addressed. There is a general (mis)conception that gender-based violence (GBV) is not of relevance for fisheries management or a topic within the remit of practitioners. Through a global review of capture fisheries, we illustrate how five types of GBV—physical, sexual, psychological, economic and cultural—are pervasive and can be reinforced by fisheries policies, practices and institutions. Our synthesis shows a variety of activities associated with these forms of violence, such as labour and human rights abuses, unsafe working and living conditions for children, women and men, and the cultural acceptance of various forms of discrimination. We argue GBV cannot be disentangled from other actions taken to achieve equitable social outcomes through fisheries management. We provide seven recommendations to help practitioners understand and work towards addressing GBV in capture fisheries: (1) removing gender blindness and bias by investing in gender-sensitisation of the sector; (2) forming strategic partnerships; (3) improving policy and coordination between regulatory bodies; (4) increasing investments in labour rights and laws; (5) gender integrative programme design and implementation; (6) investing in specific programs for the empowerment of women; and (7) investing in specific programs for men seeking healthy models of masculinity.

## KEYWORDS

child labour, discrimination, gender norms, hypermasculinity, trafficking, transactional sex

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Fisheries and aquaculture are a source of food, nutritional security and livelihoods for approximately 1 billion people residing predominantly in the Global South (Short et al., 2021). Fair, equitable and functioning families, communities and societies are critical to building resilience in fisheries and the people who are dependent upon them (Coulthard et al., 2020; Lawless et al., 2021). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is grounded in the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights treaties (Resolution A/RES/70/1, UN General Assembly). This means that fisheries practitioners and policy makers (i.e. professionals undertaking research, providing advice or managing fisheries), need to recognise that Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 Life Below Water is rooted in human rights principles and standards, including gender equality (SDG 5). Practitioners must work to ensure *no one is left behind* and those furthest behind are prioritised within their sector (Resolution A/RES/70/1, UN General Assembly). This requires

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greater consideration of the social aspects of fisheries, including harms such as violence and its gendered dimensions (Coulthard et al., 2020). How fisheries interventions and management contribute to or address violence, is critical to socially equitable sustainable fisheries and is an opportunity for the sector to contribute to the SDGs.

Attention to the gender dimensions of fisheries have rapidly increased over the past two decades (Barclay et al., 2021, 2022; Williams et al., 2002). These efforts have led to an increased understanding of the gender divisions in labour between women and men in fish harvesting and value chains (Barclay et al., 2022), and differential gendered experiences and freedoms to access and make decisions about marine resources (Lawless et al., 2019; Locke et al., 2017). Yet, the intersection between fisheries and gender-based violence (GBV) has received much less attention. GBV is inherently part of working on gender and cannot be disentangled from other actions taken to address gender inequality in sectors, including fisheries (Coulthard et al., 2020). GBV is any act of violence against a person or group of individuals based on their gender, and includes physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, psychological threats, harassment, coercion or any other deprivations of liberty (UN Women, 2020). The term 'gender-based' is used when violence is shaped by gender roles and expectations, power and status in society (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). Although most GBV is perpetrated by men against women, it does include targeted violence towards LGBTIQ+ persons, or the harassment or rape of men to shame them for being feminine (Idriss, 2022); both of which stem from harmful gender norms (i.e. beliefs and expectations about the different roles, responsibilities and behaviours of women and men). Gender inequalities, discrimination and social norms perpetuate GBV and can be further shaped by ethnicity, age, social class, religion, sexual orientation, (dis)ability and/or historical factors such as deep-rooted cultural practices, colonisation or conflict (e.g. Joseph & Doon, 2021; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Steele et al., 2020). Economic and political institutions and systems, which include policy and legal frameworks, can perpetuate GBV, shape its prevention, and provide support services to victims such as access to justice (Benschop & Verloo, 2006).

Most fisheries practitioners are unlikely to be familiar with GBV in their sector, nor consider it to be within their remit, and are likely to narrowly focus on physical violence (Barclay et al., 2021). They are also unlikely to understand how their programmes, projects and activities might result in, contribute to, or further exacerbate GBV. This is not unexpected given that most fisheries practitioners are trained in biological rather than social sciences, the limited investment organisations make to build the capacity of their staff to integrate gender into fisheries, and the current low benchmark that has been set by the sector in terms of applying good gender practice (Lawless et al., 2021, 2022; Mangubhai et al., 2022; Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). Governing fisheries resources in ignorance of these problems can precipitate or inflame GBV, and risk harm and marginalisation of the most vulnerable or at-risk people in the sector. Given the overarching goal of fisheries governance is to benefit people, if people are being harmed by fisheries practices, this can be considered a governance failure.

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The social and economic impacts of GBV are considerable, with estimated costs of up to 3.7% of countries' national GDP (World Bank, 2019). There are a growing number of studies shedding light on how GBV occurs in different sectors including agriculture (Gbolahan, 2013), forestry (Castañeda Carney et al., 2020), water, sanitation and hygiene (Sommer et al., 2015), fisheries (Coulthard et al., 2020; Syddall, 2023), and environment (Castañeda Carney et al., 2020). Gendered power relations, roles and associated expectations mean women and girls are particularly vulnerable to violence, and these can be further exacerbated or triggered by socioeconomic and environmental stressors (FAO, 2010). Governments around the world are not on track to meet SDG 5 target 5.2 to "Eliminate all

forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”, with gender inequalities expected to widen as a result of COVID-19 (UN Women, 2021). Globally, an estimated 35% of women are believed to have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, with 38% of murders of women perpetrated by a male intimate partner (WHO, 2014). This includes *femicide*, the intentional murder of women and girls because they are female, an issue which is not prevalent for men and boys. Furthermore, women represent 98% of victims of sexual exploitation and 55% of victims of forced labour (UN Women, 2016). However, GBV does not just apply to women and girls; men and boys also experience and are vulnerable to different forms of GBV (Russo & Pirlott, 2006; Syddall, 2023), and we present the evidence for both in this paper.

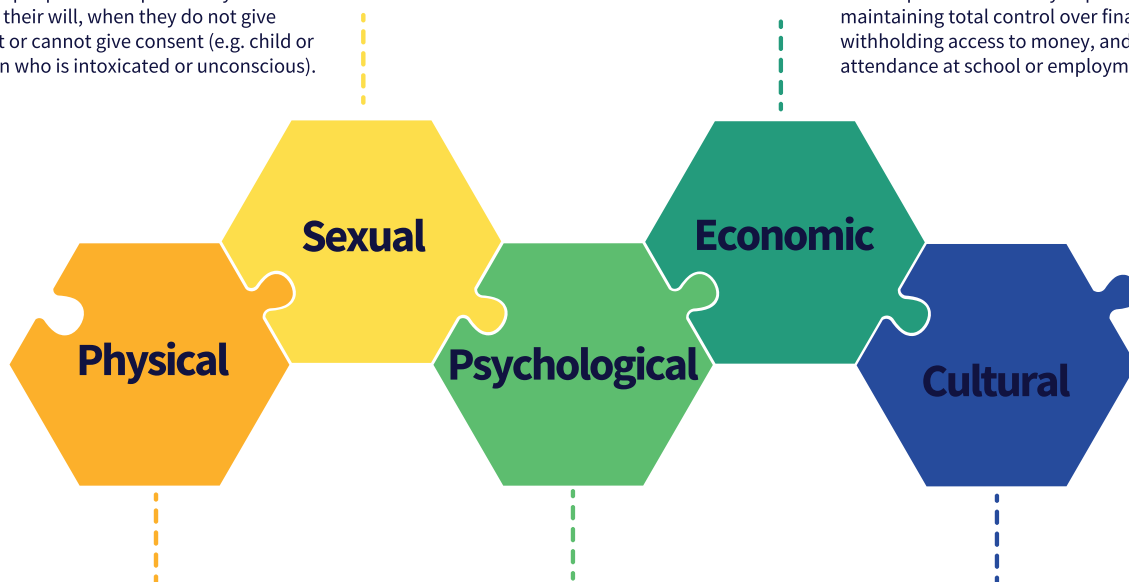
Sectoral activities of any type carry risks of violence. Declines in or loss of access to natural resources, including fisheries, can result in increased conflicts such as exploitative labour practices (EJF, 2015; FAO, 2010; Fiorella et al., 2015), use of fishing boats for dangerous drug trades (Belhabib et al., 2020; UNODC, 2011), or violent acts of piracy (Sumaila & Bawumia, 2014). There may be an increase in intimate partner violence (Coulthard et al., 2020), as people in the fisheries sector try to cope with economic hardship or poverty. GBV in fisheries can be worsened in cultures or places (including workplaces such as fishing vessels and ports) that promote *hypermasculinity*, a sociological term used to describe the exaggeration of certain types of male stereotypic behaviour such as physical strength, aggression

and sexuality (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). The more extreme forms of hypermasculinity are *toxic masculinities* that “foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence” (Ingram et al., 2019), and may include *misogyny*, the hatred of, contempt for or prejudice against women.

Here, we adopt four of the GBV types categorised by the United Nations—*physical, sexual, psychological, economic* (UN Women, 2020)—and include a fifth, *cultural violence* (Figure 1). This is the first time this typology has been applied to fisheries. Cultural violence is included because sexism, hypermasculinity and misogyny are more often embedded in cultures that make certain types of violence seem normal or invisible (Galtung, 1990). Cultural violence often underlies different forms of violence and emerged as relevant for fisheries from the literature reviewed for this paper. We conducted a global scoping review to synthesise evidence of GBV within formal and informal fisheries (including along supply chains) to demonstrate why the sector should be aware of the need to address GBV. A scoping review is a useful tool when the objective of the review is to “identify knowledge gaps, scope a body of literature, clarify concepts or to investigate research conduct” (Munn et al., 2018). Similar to the approach used by Coulthard et al. (2020), we used keyword combinations such as “fisheries and gender-based violence/GBV”, “fisheries and violence”, “fisheries and sex”, “fisheries and masculinities”, “fisheries and child”, “fisheries and human rights”, amongst others, to find relevant publications in peer-reviewed journals and grey literature written in the English language over the

**Sexual violence** is the forcing of a person or group of people to take part in any sexual act against their will, when they do not give consent or cannot give consent (e.g. child or a person who is intoxicated or unconscious).

**Economic violence** is making or attempting to make a person financially dependent by maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding access to money, and/or forbidding attendance at school or employment.



**Physical violence** is the physical hurting of another individual or groups of individuals. It includes denying of medical care or forcing drug use or the drinking of alcohol, and intentional physical damage to a person’s property.

**Psychological violence** is the causing of fear through intimidation, threatening physical harm, forcing isolation from family or friends, and can include the destruction of property. This includes coercive control where a person is made to feel scared and isolated through manipulation and intimidation.

**Cultural violence** is any aspect of culture (exemplified by religion, ideology, language and art) that justifies or legitimises violence.

**FIGURE 1** Definitions of the five types of gender-based violence relevant to capture fisheries—physical, sexual, psychological, economic (UN Women, 2020) and cultural (Galtung, 1990).

period 2002 to 2022. We accessed the literature through search engines Google Scholar and ResearchGate, and ScienceDirect and Scopus databases. We reviewed the reference lists for all key scientific papers and reports. A total of 263 references were downloaded, of which 139 provided evidence of one or more forms of GBV. Two independent reviewers examined each document to confirm their relevance to the study. All 139 files were labelled to ensure there were no duplicates. The literature was synthesised and organised under emerging subthemes, aligned to global discourse.

The authors acknowledge that GBV does not occur in or as a result of all fishery-related activities. However, our paper focuses on GBV to provide evidence of where and how it does or can occur in both the formal and informal fisheries (Section 2). We then provide practical and tangible recommendations to fisheries practitioners on their role and responsibilities when it comes to GBV, and how they can work towards addressing this for their sector (Section 3).

## 2 | EVIDENCE FOR FIVE TYPES OF VIOLENCE

In this section we summarise the evidence for five types of GBV present in fisheries (Figure 1), noting that the categories are not mutually exclusive. Specific instances of GBV may involve elements of more than one type of violence operating together. The literature was dominated by articles that focused on physical and sexual violence.

### 2.1 | Physical violence

#### 2.1.1 | Human trafficking: Forced labour and slavery

*Human trafficking* involving forced labour (Watson & Silkstone, 2006), is sometimes associated with illegal fishing practices and involves largely men and boys (EJF, 2010, 2014, 2019; Simmons & Stringer, 2014). Forced labour is a form of GBV when it is shaped by gender roles and expectations and can be prevalent on boats that promote hypermasculinity. This can lead to bullying of crew members that may be deemed less masculine. Article 2(1) of the 1930 Forced Labour Convention defines *forced labour* as “all work or service that is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered [themselves] voluntarily”. In this paper, we address sex trafficking involving women and girls as sexual violence (Section 2.2). The majority of human trafficking in fishing is associated with large industrial long-haul fishing vessels. People who are trafficked for fishing can be sold to different illegal fishing vessels that may stay at sea for many years restocked by supply ships and includes boys under the age of 17 (EJF, 2010, 2015). In these instances, fish workers enter into employment, then find out that conditions are different to what they agreed to, and are not able to freely withdraw their labour due to their passports being confiscated or being trapped by *debt bondage*

(Marschke & Vandergeest, 2016). Debt bondage is when a person is forced to work to pay off a debt to their employer that is extremely difficult to ever repay, with most of the money earned going to pay off their loan (Derks, 2010).

Examples of extreme physical abuse have been documented on industrial fishing vessels, where crew members have been reportedly “punched, beaten with metal rods, deprived of sleep, imprisoned without food or water, and forced to continue working after injury, [with] the worst cases of violence [including] murder” (EJF, 2010). A study of migrant fishers from Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar working in Thailand found 16.9% identified themselves as trafficked persons and had suffered physical and mental abuse at the hands of boat captains or their employers (Chantavanich et al., 2016). Migrant workers may be vulnerable to exploitation on fishing vessels, fishing platforms, at ports or fish processing plants if they are working illegally (due to employers failing to obtain work permits), have language barriers or are without access to services to inform and protect their labour rights (UNIAP, 2011; UNODC, 2011). A study from the Greater Mekong subregion found that 41.8% of men and boys working in fisheries worked more than 20h/day (Pocock et al., 2016). More than half of workers (53.3%) experienced severe violence, and over a third (38.9%) spent more than 2 years in a trafficking situation (ibid.). Furthermore, these workers had no access or did not use personal protective equipment and had received no medical attention for loss of body parts.

#### 2.1.2 | Substance abuse-related violence in fisheries

GBV related to substance abuse has been documented in the fisheries sector (e.g. Coulthard et al., 2020; Pougnet et al., 2014). Consumption of addictive substances amongst seafarers (largely men) includes alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, heroin, cocaine and other drugs (Amit Bhondve, 2013; Matheson et al., 2001; Pougnet et al., 2014). A review of the global literature between 1993 and 2013 found 63.1% (range 38.4%–96.3%) of seafarers smoked tobacco and 14.5% (range 8.8%–75%) drank alcohol, which is higher than the general population (Pougnet et al., 2014). Substance abuse in seafarers is believed to be linked to poor living conditions combined with occupational stress (e.g. dangerous situations such as fishing at night and high risk of drowning, geographic isolation, social isolation, long shifts, physical hardship, extensive periods away from home), and can lead to incidences of physical violence between crew members (MacPherson et al., 2012). Peer-pressure has been identified as a driver of alcohol consumption among seafarers, as part of working in high-risk environments where hypermasculinity is valued (Pollnac & Poggie, 2008). Hypermasculine working environments such as seafaring, mining, forestry and construction that promote substance abuse are often reinforced by gender roles and stereotypes. Furthermore, in some cultural contexts, drinking can become part of the identity as fishers, reinforced through cultural and religious beliefs around masculinity (Busby, 1999; Ediom-Ubong, 2014, 2015). Violence associated with substance abuse is not just restricted to at

sea and ports, and some may take out their occupational stress at home with their wives and family (Coulthard et al., 2020). Physical violence in the home may be further exacerbated by household and marital strains caused by men working away on fisheries boats for long periods of time, and adverse socioeconomic conditions (Ibid).

### 2.1.3 | Violence associated with fisheries compliance and surveillance

Monitoring, compliance and surveillance are a critical part of fisheries management and these responsibilities largely lie with government agencies. Enforcement officers can suffer GBV as part of hypermasculine shipside culture, while hypermasculine policy cultures can in turn lead to GBV by enforcement officers against fishers. Physical violence towards government staff (who are mostly men) serving as observers on offshore industrial fishing vessels has been documented (Human Rights at Sea, 2020). For example, a number of Pacific Island observers have died under suspicious circumstances while serving as observers on foreign fishing vessels operating in their waters (Human Rights at Sea, 2017, 2021). There are also examples of violence by enforcement officers towards fishers suspected of fisheries crimes which violate fishers' rights (i.e. rights at work, freedom from violence, access to justice). Migrant fishers may be particularly vulnerable to physical violence by enforcement officers due to their legal status or lack of knowledge of local laws (Amnesty International, 2008), or during evictions from an area due to the establishment of marine protected areas (Cross, 2016; Cross et al., 2010). Evictions are a form of violence that can traumatise the people involved, leading to a sense of confusion, insecurity and isolation. This can be exacerbated if individuals (and especially children) have witnessed or themselves been subjected to violent incidents which are often gender-based.

### 2.1.4 | Child labour

Child labour exists in fisheries and the roles girls and boys play is highly gendered. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines *child labour* as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development,” and includes work that is “mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children and/or interferes with their schooling” (e.g. depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, or forced to combine school education with physically demanding or time-consuming work). Child labour does not include children helping parents in safe environments outside of education hours, as part of learning skills and responsibilities (FAO, 2021; ILO, & UNICEF, 2021). Children are extremely vulnerable, and GBV is often part of the experience of child labour.

While child labour is dealt as its own subject matter and is highly contextual, it can fit under all five types of violence, especially physical and financial. In 2020, FAO (2021) reported there

were 160 million child labourers globally, with 70% engaged in the agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture; for the first time in a decade, child labour is on the rise. The elimination of child labour can be challenging because it is part of productive systems, and often linked to poverty and social injustices (FAO & ILO, 2013). Boys are more often engaged in small and large-scale fishing, or in the transport of seafood products from the boats anchored at wharfs to trucks to be transported to a factory. Girls tend to be involved in post-harvest processing (e.g. sorting, peeling, filleting, salting, smoking, curing, drying and packing). Child labour in fisheries tends to be concentrated in areas and situations where fisher migration is high, such as West and Central Africa (FAO & ILO, 2013; Njock & Westlund, 2010). Girls are more likely to experience a high burden of domestic labour in cases where their mother participates in fisheries value-chains (FAO, 2021). While there is limited sector-disaggregated data, child labour largely occurs in small-scale fisheries for domestic supply chains and local consumption (FAO, 2021; Hosch et al., 2011), with boys aged 15–17 years recruited in some parts of the world onto industrial fishing boats (see Section 2.1.1).

Declines in fisheries stocks can lead to an increase in child labour to make up the additional work required to maintain catches or supplement household income (FAO, 2010). Economic shocks for households experiencing high levels of poverty can result in children being removed from school to participate in fisheries labour forces (FAO & ILO, 2013). Children of migrant fishers, especially those working in informal or semi-formal jobs can be vulnerable to child labour because they move with their parents and face barriers (e.g. language, legal status) to attend school. Child labour in the fisheries sector can have profound impacts on their education, mental and physical development and keeping them trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty (FAO, 2010; FAO & ILO, 2013).

## 2.2 | Sexual violence

### 2.2.1 | Transactional sex and prostitution

In order to secure fish for food or for livelihoods there are examples of women trading their bodies in what has been termed as *transactional sex* or prostitution. Transactional sex is highly gendered and is defined as a relationship that involves the exchange of money or material goods (largely provided by men) for sex (largely provided by women) (Béné & Merten, 2008; Camlin et al., 2013). Although there is a sexual and economic component to *sex-for-fish* transactions, it is often differentiated from formal sex work because the women involved may not view themselves as sex workers, although the distinction between sex worker and fish worker may be blurry (MacPherson et al., 2012).

The majority of the *sex-for-fish* cases documented come from eastern and southern Africa, particularly inland fisheries around lakes Victoria (Fiorella et al., 2015) and Malawi (MacPherson et al., 2012). Women enter into sexual and transactional arrangements with fishermen in order to secure benefits such as fish for food, livelihoods

(e.g. fish processing, trading), housing, capital or emotional support (Béné & Merten, 2008). Sex-for-fish is an example of economic and sexual violence intersecting, where women with food insecurity and low incomes do not have equitable market access or bargaining powers. This practice, termed *transactional sexual economies*, is prevalent and normative in Sub-Saharan Africa (Poulin, 2007), and in the case of fisheries, is perpetuated when ecological health of fish stocks is poor (Fiorella et al., 2015). Some women, particularly those that are poor, widowed or unmarried may be coerced into these arrangements, with fishermen refusing to sell them fish unless sex is provided first (Béné & Merten, 2008). In some cases, women form girlfriend-boyfriend-type relationships with a specific fisherman to secure regular access to fish at cheaper prices (Ibid.).

Transactional sex occurs in a variety of ways between seafarers and locals around ports all over the world, and may include legal or illegal sex for cash or goods, and include people who are choosing to freely enter into these relationships or transactions, and those with limited livelihood options (Allison & Seeley, 2004). In some contexts, hypermasculinity is pervasive and condones or encourages men to engage in multi-partner casual or commercial sex in rural and in port settings (Ibid.). Unequal power dynamics in some circumstances make it difficult for women to negotiate for safe sex (MacPherson et al., 2012). Unfortunately, the criminalisation of sex work usually impacts women more than fishermen (e.g. arresting of women leaving tuna boats in Micronesian countries, Vunisea, 2006), and can drive it underground leaving women vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, with little protection through the justice system. Transactional sex and prostitution come with health risks from HIV and other types of sexually-transmitted diseases, putting seafarers, their casual sexual partners and wives (and sometimes their unborn children) at home all at-risk (Allison & Seeley, 2004). Seafarers are often considered a high-risk group for sexually transmitted diseases, especially men who have sex with men or sex workers (WHO, 2010).

## 2.2.2 | Human trafficking: Sex slavery

Fishing vessels have been used to support sex trafficking operations. GBV includes human trafficking where sex is forced on an individual and is not transactional; though this distinction is not always obvious and should not be used as an excuse to intentionally overlook GBV risks in transactional sex relations. Globally 21 million people, the majority of whom are women and girls, are trafficked annually for prostitution or labour that is worth US\$150 billion (World Vision, 2022). In some shipping ports, sex trafficking may be part of wider criminal activities, including drug smuggling and dealing. Local and national authorities can play complicit roles, accepting money or other gifts to turn a blind eye. Casey (2019) describes a case of fishing boat in Venezuela that capsized and sank while trafficking people, leading to the loss of lives of people seeking to escape poverty. As a result, a number of government coastguards were arrested for their role in human sex trafficking. Fishing boats have been used as vehicles for trafficking, with traffickers targeting impoverished women

and girls with promise of work or food. Once on the boat, the victims are deprived of their passports and other forms of identification documents, and forced on long, sometimes dangerous journeys across water only to be forced into sex slavery when they reach their destiny (Casey, 2019).

## 2.2.3 | Sexual harassment

Women who sell fish in public spaces including boat landing sites or in local markets face risk of sexual harassment and other forms of abuse by fishermen, customers, male retailers and local authorities (Deb et al., 2015; Demmke, 2006; UN Women, 2014). In Bangladesh, some women choose to become mobile fish vendors as strategy to ward off sexual harassment, or need to find support from sympathetic men to resolve conflicts that impact their ability to operate in a market place (Deb et al., 2015). In some cultural contexts such as India, women fish sellers prefer not to report verbal threats and sexual harassment to the police out of fear of the repercussions for them (Tripathi et al., 2016). Although it is largely women who experienced sexual harassment in markets, some Indian men also reported harassment in market places (Ibid.). There is also documented bullying and sexual harassment from men when women fishers enter what is considered to be a male-dominated sector (Szymkowiak, 2020). There are gender norms and cultural barriers to women serving as ship observers, and those who do, can face threats of physical and sexual violence (Rabonu, 2021; Thomson, 2021). The greater risks women face as observers or crew, are often used as a reason against them choosing this career pathway, rather than addressing safety concerns and underlying discriminations relating to fisheries employment. Anecdotally, the physical abuse suffered by male crew on some fishing vessels includes rape and sexual harassment.

## 2.3 | Psychological violence

All forms of violence have a psychological aspect, since the main aim of those who perpetrate violence or other forms of abuse is to hurt or degrade the dignity and integrity of another person. In the fisheries sector, this can include *abuse of vulnerability* where an employer takes advantage of a worker's vulnerability and forces them to work (UNODC, 2013). This can include situations where those employed in the fisheries sector are dependent on their employer for their basic needs, including access to food, water, sanitation, accommodation and medical facilities (Simmons & Stringer, 2014). There are also documented cases of employers retaining passports and other forms of identification documents, seaman's record books, and/or not obtaining or supporting the legally required work permits, and then using coercion and threats of reporting to authorities to control employees (Chantavanich et al., 2016). Here physical violence, specifically forced labour, creates an enabling environment for psychological violence. Such violence may include gender-based elements such as denigrating crew as being weak 'like a woman'.

Some fishers may suffer from the psychological trauma of seeing violence or murder at sea (EJF, 2010). The highly stressful nature of working at sea within a “closed, strongly hierarchical group of other crew members with a ‘paramilitary’ organizational structure” with limited contact with their family can lead to high levels of stress and in extreme cases, may lead to suicide (King et al., 2015; Szymańska et al., 2006).

## 2.4 | Economic violence

Fisheries is an important economic sector with people reliant on it as a source of income. *Economic violence* includes the taking away of earnings of the victim, not allowing them to have a separate income (e.g. delegating their role to housewife, or making them work in a family business without a salary), or making the victim unfit for work through targeted physical abuse. In some cases, husbands may have a strong influence on what work a woman can or cannot do in the fisheries sector (Manyungwa et al., 2019), with some using violence to control their wives (Busby, 1999). This can also include deprivation of fisheries (e.g. fishing boats, gear) or non-fisheries (e.g. land transportation) resources that enable them to pursue fisheries livelihoods (Geheb et al., 2008). Although out of the scope of this paper, it is important to note that GBV is perpetuated by poverty, limited economic returns, and itself perpetuates poverty fuelled by economic stress (Stöckl et al., 2014). Economic violence includes women's income from work in the fisheries sector being taken or controlled by male family members including those working in seafood processing factories and selling at local markets. A fisheries project that improves women's incomes may contribute to violence in households if husbands or male relatives try to control the income or limit women's ability to work (Anitha, 2019). For example, a study of three municipal fisheries markets in Fiji found 2.6%–4% of women fishers and 4.9%–9.1% of women seafood traders had decisions made for them on what happened to their earnings (Mangubhai, Berdejo, Naleba, & Arnett, 2019; Mangubhai, Berdejo, Naleba, Arnett, & Nand, 2019; Mangubhai, Vitukawalu, Nand, & Berdejo, 2019) by their husband or another male relative. These examples highlight how power imbalances based on patriarchal systems and gender inequalities limit women's ability to fully participate in the economic opportunities and decision-making in the fisheries sector, exposing many of them to economic violence (Anitha, 2019; Golden et al., 2020).

Economic violence has been documented on some long-haul fishing boats (i.e. boats that stay out fishing for more than a month) and involves deception on living and work conditions (e.g. hours, wages), the withholding of wages, use of debt bondage and financial penalties making it near impossible for fishers to leave their employers (Chantavanich et al., 2016; Simmons & Stringer, 2014). For example, Stringer and Harré (2019) documented cases of Indonesian crew on Korean boats being coerced into signing incorrect timesheets which were then used to underpay them, with little to no records being kept of wages and bonuses over the term of their contract. In other cases, crew members have been forced to pay back broker fees that

amount to many months of salary (Marschke & Vandergeest, 2016) and are dependent on agents or their employer to transfer money home to their families (Stringer & Harré, 2019). Often the extent of broker fees or loans is hidden from the worker to induce them to enter into employment. There are reports of crew being forced to work very long hours including up to 17–24h per day or working indefinite hours that do not comply with ILO's recommendations and being denied sick leave or holidays (Chantavanich et al., 2016; EJF, 2010). In extreme cases some, especially those operating on illegal vessels, have gone without pay for several years (EJF, 2010). The withholding of wages is recognised by the ILO as a form of human trafficking. It is important to note that although it is not well-reported in the scientific literature, debt bondage also occurs in small-scale fisheries between fishers and middlemen (FAO, 2021).

## 2.5 | Cultural violence

Fisheries are embedded in sociocultural values and systems (Ignatius et al., 2019; Veitayaki, 2000). *Cultural violence* refers to culturally based justifications of direct or structural violence and can take the form of stories, songs, language use, aspects of religions or traditions, assumptions or stereotypes (Galtung, 1990). For example, in Fiji women who work on fishing vessels have been ostracised by other women for not following sociocultural norms (A. Vunisea, pers. comm.). The ways in which cultural practice intersects with GBV vary between contexts and geographies (Galtung, 1990). Cultural practices can include social norms and attitudes towards childhood, work and responsibilities to the family and can contribute to a prevalence of child labour in the fisheries sector (FAO, 2010). For example, in Ghana children engage in fishing as part of their sociocultural identity that is linked to their ethnicity. In such places, the sector can become dependent (especially if there is no formal training for fisheries), on fishing skills being passed on through children helping parents in fisheries (Ibid.). In Madagascar, violence towards women is socially accepted, including amongst women in fishing communities (Singleton et al., 2019). In Solomon Islands women fishers raised concerns about men's controlling behaviour and jealousy hindering their fishing activities, which included blame for unsuccessful catches by fishermen (Makhoul et al., 2023). The cultural privileges of men being seen as heads of households and increasing engagement of women in economic sectors affecting household dynamics and relationships could be enablers for such harmful behaviour that go hand-in-hand with psychological violence (Ibid.).

## 3 | PATHWAYS TO ADDRESSING GBV IN CAPTURE FISHERIES

Our scoping review highlights that GBV is pervasive throughout the fisheries sector, is highly contextual, and strongly embedded in gender, social and cultural norms and relations at the family, community and society levels. There are growing examples from the fisheries

sector of each of the five types of GBV—physical, sexual, psychological, economic and cultural—that may interact or occur in synergy.

Despite the prevalence of GBV in fisheries, it is seldom addressed or considered by fisheries practitioners and is poorly recognised in global reports such as FAO's State of the World's Fisheries. While there are examples of organisations trying to create safe spaces for women in market places (e.g. UN Women), or addressing breaches of labour laws at sea (e.g. Human Rights at Sea), more investment is needed. GBV cannot be disentangled from other actions taken to achieve social and gender equality in fisheries. Therefore, we argue that fisheries policies, practices and institutions can perpetuate GBV or shape its prevention. The challenge is that most fisheries practitioners do not know how to safely and effectively navigate and address GBV within their sector because they lack knowledge, qualifications and experience. Furthermore, they may have genuine and valid concerns about causing more harm (i.e. increasing GBV) if they attempt to tackle these issues with insufficient knowledge and experience (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). Building on the synthesis of our findings, we provide seven broad recommendations to help fisheries institutions and practitioners recognise, approach and ultimately start to address GBV in their sector.

### 3.1 | Removing gender blindness and bias by investing in gender-sensitisation of the sector

Fisheries practitioners and their institutions have limited knowledge, capacity and experience related to the integration of gender equality principles and good practice into their sector (Lawless et al., 2022; Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021), and are largely gender blind (Barclay et al., 2022; Lawless et al., 2021). This requires a fundamental shift in thinking where practitioners need to recognise that fisheries resources and food systems cannot be sustainably managed or protected without the social safeguards in place to protect people's rights, and to understand those rights. To overcome this requires continuous and consistent investment in gender mainstreaming capacity to strengthen skills and knowledge that will remove gender blindness and bias at the individual and institutional level that is persistent in the fisheries sector (Mangubhai et al., 2022). Through capacity investments, fisheries practitioners have the opportunity to become more gender aware and sensitive to how GBV can manifest in their sector. Increased sensitivity means the underlying root causes of GBV can be understood, leading to informed approaches to address GBV as part of fisheries best practice. However, even with training, it is unrealistic for fisheries practitioners to have the same level of expertise as GBV practitioners, and we consider strategic partnerships as essential (Mangubhai et al., 2022).

### 3.2 | Forming strategic partnerships

Given the lack of experience and the complexity of addressing harmful gender norms, relations and systems in sectoral spaces such as

fisheries, it is recommended that fisheries authorities partner with gender experts to appropriately deliver the services and safeguards required to prevent GBV. Partnerships may be formed with government agencies, development partners, the private sector, worker's associations and civil society organisations. The type of partnerships needed will differ between geographies and cultural contexts, and should be tailored to the forms of GBV that occur in capture fisheries. Countries with high levels of child labour in the fisheries sector may consider partnering the ILO, FAO and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) which have recommendations and approaches to tackling GBV in development sectors (e.g. FAO & ILO, 2013; ILO, & UNICEF, 2021). Multi-country strategic partnerships will be required to tackle transboundary issues such as trafficking and slavery, as well as targeted violence against migrant fishers and workers, especially since these issues often fall outside any effective regulatory law of the sea framework. Addressing transnational criminal activities in the fishing industry may benefit from partnerships with the UN Office of Drugs and Crime or Human Rights at Sea. At the domestic level, trafficking may require close coordination with institutions such as customs, immigration, maritime defence (navy), police authorities and the judicial systems. Growing awareness of mental and physical health issues in fisheries may need collaborations with a range of seafarer welfare, mental, physical and sexual health services, and other support groups (King et al., 2015). Gender affairs and social welfare organisations can assist in coordinating such services around ports to help address some of the types of GBV noted in the scoping (Section 2). Equipundo specialises in promoting healthy masculinities (and dismantling toxic masculinities), and partnering with such organisations could help address the cultural violence elements of seafarer culture, and other GBV fed by toxic masculinities in fisheries.

### 3.3 | Improving policy and coordination between regulatory bodies

Addressing GBV requires fisheries authorities to improve policy coordination between regulatory bodies. This coordination is needed in two broad areas: *prevention*—addressing the root causes of GBV; and *protection*—putting in place measures to protect workers from GBV. Improvements in policy and practice should be combined with targeted initiatives to address the underlying structural issues that expose those working in the fisheries sector to GBV. Implementation of national laws, regulations and other measures concerning occupational safety and health can help protect the rights of workers and ensure safe conditions for those in the fisheries sector. For example, ensuring there is adequate national policies and legislation on child labour (e.g. national minimum age legislation, prohibition of trafficking, slavery and forced labour), as well as adequate enforcement thereof, can contribute to prevention (FAO, 2010). Efforts to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries should be designed to include human rights abuses at sea, including GBV. This may require coordination with national statistics to collect better and more



cost-effective data on GBV-relevant issues, including formal and informal labour in fisheries (FAO, 2010), to inform and improve policy and practice.

### 3.4 | Increasing investments in labour rights and laws

The rights of migrant workers are often poorly addressed by national institutions, despite many sectors being heavily dependent on migrant workers, and may require special consideration by authorities. All countries should be encouraged to commit and work towards the various ILO conventions aimed at ensuring fundamental labour rights of all workers, are recognised in national fisheries laws and policies. These include regulating freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, non-discrimination in the workplace, eradication of forced labour and elimination of child labour, as well as standards for working conditions, recruitment and repatriation practices, living conditions on board vessels and the minimum age. There is global guidance for offshore or large-scale fisheries particularly around forced labour and slavery (e.g. Buller et al., 2015) and child labour (e.g. FAO & ILO, 2013). Potential *entry points* for addressing GBV include occupational safety and health assessments and interventions for improved actions, including safety at sea. For example, an ILO-supported project helped Sri Lankan small-scale fishers free themselves from debt bondage to middlemen by establishing fishers' cooperatives, helping fishers open bank accounts, pay back loans and break debt cycles (FAO, 2021). Video cameras are being tested in the Pacific to reduce the need for fisheries observers to travel on vessels to monitor fishing, thus reducing their risk of violence. The Migrant Worker Rights Network has supported Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand's seafood export industry to negotiate with employers or file complaints with government labour offices related to labour law and rights breaches, while enabling workers to hold onto their identity documents (Connell, 2019). The Keelung Migrant Fishermen's Union has similarly been set up to help Indonesian migrants working on Taiwanese vessels to self-organise to defend their basic rights, interests and well-being (Kao, 2021). With stronger protection of labour rights, the risks of violence, including GBV, will be reduced.

### 3.5 | Gender integrative programme design and implementation

Gender equality should be adopted as a key principle by the fisheries sector, with commitments and actions to integrate gender into programme design and implementation (Barclay et al., 2021; Mangubhai et al., 2022). Gender interventions should be culturally embedded, working with family structures and cultural norms to make sure they are productive. There may be value in adopting a *leave no one behind* ethos or *do no harm* approach to address all forms of GBV in the fisheries sector. Risk assessments and the implementation of social

safeguards can improve fisheries project design, planning, implementation, monitoring and adaptation, to prevent unintentional harm. In countries and places where poverty is high, poverty-alleviation strategies in a GBV context may be needed to break this cycle. However, efforts to alleviate poverty must be designed carefully and include interventions to address unequal gender norms to help mitigate any potential backlash from projects that benefit women and men. More progressive examples may include programs that actively seek to engage to prevent GBV, and presenting transformative opportunities for the sector (e.g. Instituto Promundo, 2012).

### 3.6 | Investing in specific programs for the empowerment of women

Programs are needed to support women impacted by all forms of violence. This includes efforts to ensure safety against harassment against women in markets, formal and informal fisheries workplaces and public transport (e.g. UN Women, 2014). There needs to be more accountable regulation of officials to eliminate the common demand for informal payments along value chains and trade routes, which exploit men and especially women. At the same time, there is also a need to invest in programs that support the empowerment of women in fisheries in parallel with interventions aimed at changing harmful gender norms, which can help reduce or protect against many forms of GBV. For example, economic empowerment programs that help reduce women's financial dependency on men or their families may enable them to leave toxic relationships. In this case, there may be a need for concurrent programs to engage male partners and communities to avoid backlash against these women. There may be a need for programs to find alternative economic options for women in the case of sex-for-fish (e.g. Nathenson et al., 2017). Initiatives to support women's voices in decision-making and in the management of fisheries resources can support addressing GBV indirectly because they build confidence and self-esteem that can help women to see or walk out of injustices related to GBV.

### 3.7 | Investing in specific programs for men seeking healthy models of masculinity

Programs are needed to support men (and boys) who are victims of GBV as well as programs that address perpetrators of GBV against men and boys. This includes working with men to address alcoholism and drug abuse, and culturally rooted framings of masculinity or maritime/seafaring hypermasculinity that perpetuate the different forms of violence. For example, in Vietnam, there are programmes to better understand the pressures men face in certain fishing communities and redefine masculinity in more positive terms to address intimate partner violence (Hoang et al., 2013). This may include leadership programmes that promote good leadership principles in seafaring and seafood processing and marketing and the mentoring of male gender champions to promote healthy masculinities in the

fisheries sector. Coupled with this is the need to provide services around port areas, so that fishers and crew can leave ships if they are being abused, and have mechanisms to address their grievances.

## 4 | CONCLUSION

The past two decades have seen increased recognition of some of the gender dimensions of fisheries (Barclay et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2002), but fisheries practitioners have not yet seriously tackled the problem of GBV. In this paper we provide the first systematic compilation of evidence about different types of GBV in the capture fisheries sector, using a schema of four types of violence (physical, sexual, psychological and economic) underpinned by a fifth type of violence (cultural). We list the types of activities associated with these forms of violence, such as labour and human rights abuses, unsafe working and living conditions for children, women and men, and the cultural acceptance of various forms of discrimination.

Addressing GBV has conventionally been seen as the responsibility of gender or social welfare practitioners but those people are not usually involved in fisheries. The ways that fisheries are managed continue to enable GBV, which works against the goal of sustainable and equitable development of fisheries, especially for lower-income earners most reliant on fisheries. It is therefore incumbent on fisheries practitioners to start to consider GBV as part of our responsibility, and think about how to tackle GBV in fisheries. Recognising that for fisheries practitioners to effectively address GBV will not be easy, we propose seven strategies to help fisheries practitioners grapple with this important topic. These strategies will also broadly improve social equity in fisheries. GBV is not a stand-alone topic, and the urgency of other pressing problems such as resource depletion, climate change, poverty, and unemployment, mean it cannot be dealt with separately, but alongside interconnected issues, aiming towards overall sustainable development.

There is not much information available about GBV in fisheries, so further research will be needed. While there is a growing body of evidence of physical and sexual GBV in fisheries contexts, there is comparatively less scholarship on psychological, economic and cultural violence. We also found much of the literature was focused around industrial fishing and abuse of labour rights at sea, and there is less on small-scale fisheries and along the informal or processing value chains where women often dominate. The limited recognition and investment in GBV in fisheries policies, practices and institutions can precipitate or inflame GBV, and risk harm and marginalisation of the most vulnerable or at-risk people in the sector. We argue that addressing GBV is inherently part of working on gender and cannot be disentangled from other actions taken to address gender inequality, and should be integral to any work on improving the social benefits from fisheries.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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