

Working Status of Women Employed in the Seafood Processing Sector

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the working status of women in the seafood processing industry. The study highlighted the job satisfaction, workplace safety, manageability of workload, physical and mental health aspects due to their work in seafood processing industry, availability of proper training, confidence in reporting issues to the superiors, availability of transportation and accommodation facility, and the obtainability of policies and benefits to the female workers in seafood processing industry. The study envisages valuable insights into the opinion of working women regarding challenges they face in the seafood processing industry, including gender discrimination, lack of access to training and promotion opportunities, and poor working conditions. Workplace safety measures are to be addressed to promote a better working condition for women. The study's outcome will be useful for seafood processing companies, policymakers, and advocacy organizations seeking to improve women's working conditions and promote gender equality in the workplace. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the significance of sustainable human resource management of seafood industry by fostering a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

Key words: *Working Women Status, Gender discrimination, seafood processing sector, Human Resource Management, Sustainable HRM.*

Introduction

Human resource management in the seafood processing industry have to ensure the empowerment of women and have to provide access to education and training programs that can help them develop new skills and advance their careers. Human Resource Managers should implement the various programs on leadership, management, and technical skills related to seafood processing. Seafood processing industry should promote gender equality and eliminate gender-based discrimination in the workplace. This could involve implementing policies and practices that ensure fair pay, equal opportunities for advancement, and a safe and respectful working environment for all employees. In addition, providing access to financial resources and social protection can help empower women in the seafood processing industry. This could include access to credit, savings programs, and social safety nets that can help women cope with unexpected financial challenges. Overall, empowering women in the seafood processing industry is essential to promoting gender equality and sustainable economic

development. By investing in women's education, training, and well-being, we can build a more equitable and prosperous future for everyone involved in the industry.

The seafood processing industry is an important sector of the global economy, providing employment and income to millions of people worldwide. Women have played a significant role in this industry, both as workers and as entrepreneurs. In many cases, women are employed in low-skilled and low-paid positions in the industry. They may work long hours, often in difficult and dangerous conditions, such as cold and wet environments, with inadequate protective gear. In some cases, they may be subjected to harassment and discrimination. Additionally, many women in the seafood processing industry work as seasonal or migrant workers, facing a range of challenges such as language barriers, lack of social protections, and difficulty accessing health care. Despite these challenges, women in the seafood processing industry have shown resilience and determination, often playing a vital role in the industry's success. Some women have risen to positions of leadership, becoming supervisors, managers, and business owners. Globally, one among the two seafood workers is a woman. The World Bank survey (World Bank, 2010) envisages that 85.5 percent of fish processing workers worldwide are women. According to a FAO report, 90 percent of all workers in secondary seafood activities, such as processing, are women (FAO, 2012). Women occupy a significant part of fisheries workforce, representing half of the entire world labor force in this sector. FAO estimates that women comprise 15% of the harvesting workforce, 70% in aquaculture, 80 to 90% in seafood processing. They also represent 60% of seafood traders and retailers in Africa and Asia. M C Monfort (2015) Women actively participate in all segments of the seafood processing industry like fishing, farming, trading and selling, monitoring and administration. Participation of women in seafood processing sectors have specific constraints and discriminations they are confronted and the emerging opportunities and threats.

Seafood processing industry in Kerala is dominated by migrant workers from different parts of India. The major fraction of women workers are migrant which reduces the working opportunity of local women workers. The condition of their work and the challenges they face in this job is an important thing to consider while assessing the working status of women in seafood processing sector. The women workers in pre-processing and processing units in different parts of Kerala contribute indirectly to the seafood export and make substantial contribution to the income of the fisheries sector through their labour participation. The major problems faced by women in the seafood sector includes poor working condition, unfair payments due to gender gap, physical health conditions, overload jobs and job insecurity. This study enables a better understanding of the challenges faced by women in seafood processing industry which in turn help in introducing many policies to benefit the workers from floor level to the managerial level. The working status of women in seafood processing sector is a major concern. Women make a remarkable contribution to the seafood processing sector and contributes to the fisheries economy of Kerala. Even though, being a major labour force, the problems faced by women workers are untold in public. Dissatisfaction with payments and benefits, physical job demands, physical health conditions, job overloads, abusiveness and job insecurity are the problems to be addressed. This paper mainly assesses the working conditions and challenges faced by women in the seafood processing industry.

Methods And Material

The present study is conducted in three different seafood processing company in Aroor panchayath, Alappuzha district. The primary data collection is done with structured questionnaire. The questionnaire involves three parts, namely, the general profile, set of questions assessing the working conditions and set of questions to know about the policies and allowances obtained by the workers.

The sample for the study is selected through random sampling of women workers from each company. The number of processing units in Alappuzha district is 51 comprising of a total of 1584 local and 2376 migrant women workers (MPEDA). The population surveyed are women workers from various seafood processing companies in Alappuzha district that are selected randomly. The sample size consists of 30 women workers, mixture of both local and migrant ones from three different seafood processing industry in Alappuzha district.

Literature Review

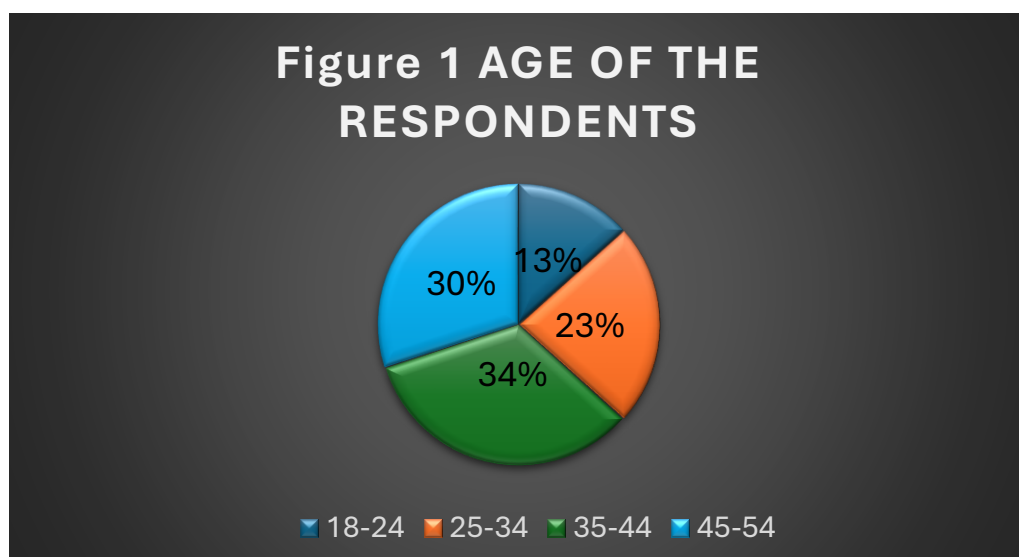
The major seafood pre-processing units in Kerala are in Aroor and Chandiroor in Alappuzha district where peeling of shrimp is exclusively done by women. Thus, women play an indispensable role in maintaining the social and cultural foundation of fishing community in Kerala. (Dhanya G, 2015). Women represent more than 75 per cent of the workforce in the seafood processing sector in India (P.Jeyanthi et.al, 2015) Women represent 50 per cent of the total population and comprise one-third of the labor force. On an estimation, there are 5.4 million people fully engaged in fisheries activities, and in this population, 3.8 million are fishermen and 1.6 million are fisherwomen. (K Samatray and S C Pathak, 2001). The seafood processing industry in India is mainly export oriented. About 25% of women working in India's labour force are engaged in pre-harvest operations, 60% in export marketing, and 40% in internal marketing. For every man, two women are employed. Amaravathi, et. al (2016), studied work-related health exposures in seafood processing plants in southern India. Declines in temperature during work were observed to be significant when compared to pre-exposure. It was observed that handling of ice and cold water, fishery products and the work environment lead to work-related health hazards such as blanching of palm, fingers, and feet; dermatitis, warts, and block spot. Beena D (1992) conducted a study on the processing plants of Kollam, Alleppy and Ernakulam to know the problems of women workers in processing plants. The paper pointed out that the decentralization of peeling activity made it an unstable industry with unorganized labour providing the workers no bargaining power. the paper also reveals that the women workers mostly in the age group 15-34 years are exploited by 12 hours working shift , low payments, no right to protest and experience many health issues.

Dhanya G (2013) highlighted the socio-economic status, marital status and wages of women laborers in seafood pre-processing units of Alappuzha district. Information collected using structured questionnaires from 100 women workers of two leading pre-processing canter showed most laborers were working on duty wage(DW), followed by regular employees and occasional laborers(OL) with 38.57% of them having one to five years' experience. The paper also described on relative health issues faced by workers due to working environment. Gopal et al. (2009), studied the various parameters affecting the sustainability of the Seafood industry and found that there is a high degree of women workers who are underpaid, mainly for reducing the cost of production and to increase export competitiveness. It was observed that there is no developmental opportunities; the work is at fixed postures and majority of workers experience no job security and are subjected to various exploitations. The working conditions of women in EU approved companies are good but many of them show poor job satisfaction. Jeyanthi. P et.al (2015) examined the employment status of women employed in seafood sector in Gujarat in five EU approved seafood processing plants of Gujarat during 2011. The study showed that wage rates of women are much lower than the minimum wages prescribed by Gujarat state for seafood industry. The results showed that employment in seafood processing sector was positively influenced by age, education, work experience, and present wages. The paper emphasized on the importance of skill development opportunities proper wage fixation. Lentisco and Lee (2014) explored that the important roles that women play in the fishing industry, not only as fish

processors and caregivers, but also as primary, secondary, and tertiary fish users. The paper criticized that women’s contribution to fishing industry go beyond the traditional role processing and preservation of fish and showed their involvement in various aspects of fish use, including fishing, fish processing, aquaculture and ecotourism. The paper also suggested that the greater recognition of women’s’ contributions is necessary for sustainable development. Nishchith V. D (2000) revealed that the dominance of women in seafood processing industry with a male to female ratio of 3:10, out of which young women of 21-30 years dominate the industry with educated ones and un-married being proportionately high. The study was conducted through structured questionnaire in about 16 randomly selected seafood industry in east coast and data analysis was carried out focusing regression analysis. The paper concluded that the women are not paid in proportion to their efforts. Priya S.V. and Sreeranganadhan K (2016) explained about the involvement and insecurities of fisherwomen in Kerala. Fisherwomen from the fishing community multiple tasks to perform. They have both industry related problems as well as family related. The study described about the problems faced by the women entrepreneurs in the fisherman community. Samantray K and Pathak S.C (2001) examined the reasons for the recessiveness of women workers in fisheries sector as illiteracy, ignorance, conservative nature, superstitions, poverty and lack of organizational support. The paper emphasized on the need for improving the literacy rate among women and also providing various organizational schemes and benefits to women workers in the sector. The paper enlisted the initiatives taken under national level to provide financial support to women entrepreneurs. Shenoy S (1992) elaborated the role women have played in the fishing industry throughout these years and how they have been raised into the managerial role and administrative role. The paper also pointed out the role that organizations like MATSYAFED have served in empowering women. The role of educated women are radiated into public as well as private sectors, many of them being successful entrepreneurs.

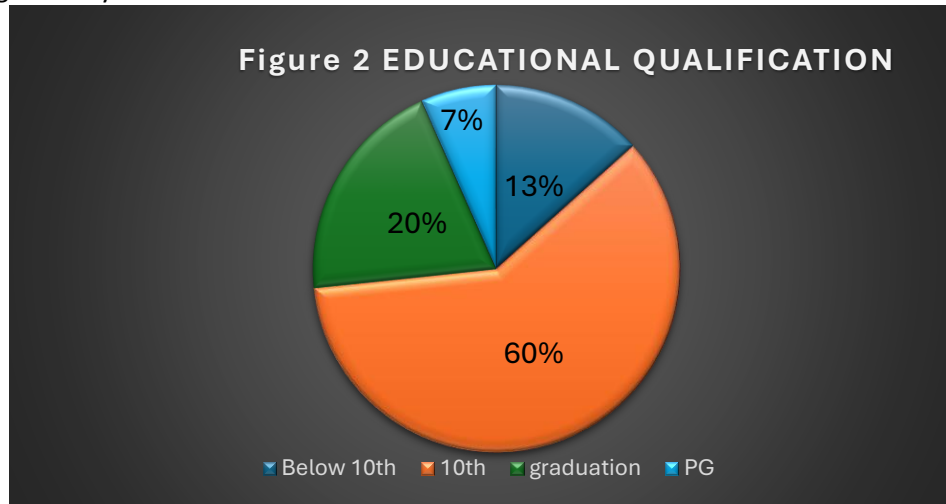
Result and Discussion

. The data analysis starts with general profile of the respondents. The expressed data begins with the age of various respondents working in three companies. Their literacy on computer were also noted, along with their educational qualification and number of income sources.



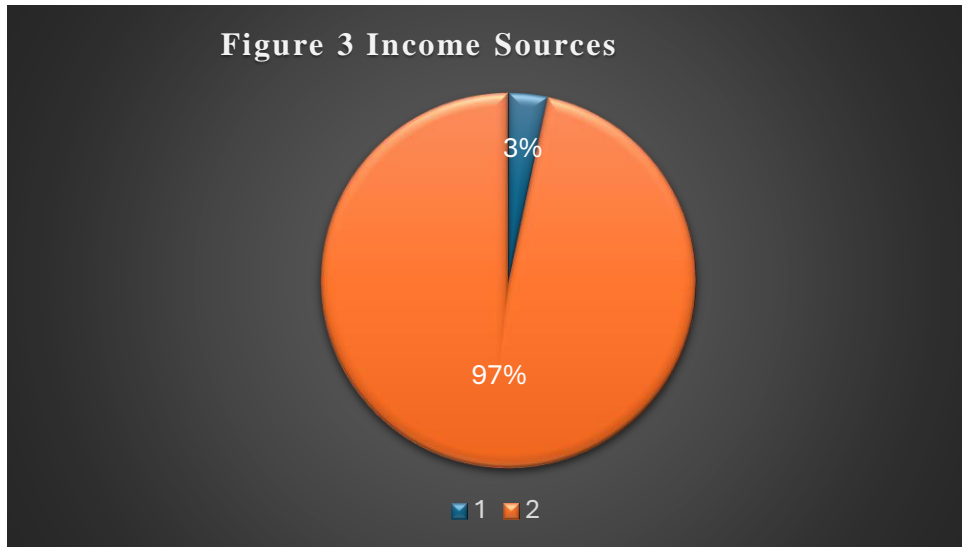
Source: Primary Survey

Figure 1: Showing the age range of the respondents. The maximum respondents are from the group 35-45 years of age forming 34% of data collected. The minimum percentage representation i.e., 13% is from 18-24 years of age group. This shows that mainly women who are responsible and at a productive age are more employed in the seafood processing industry. The maximum representation of 35-45 aged women represent the participation of expertize women who has been working for up to 10 years or more in the industry. This also suggest about how could these proportion of women have successfully navigated the challenges and barriers and have gained expertize in the seafood processing industry.



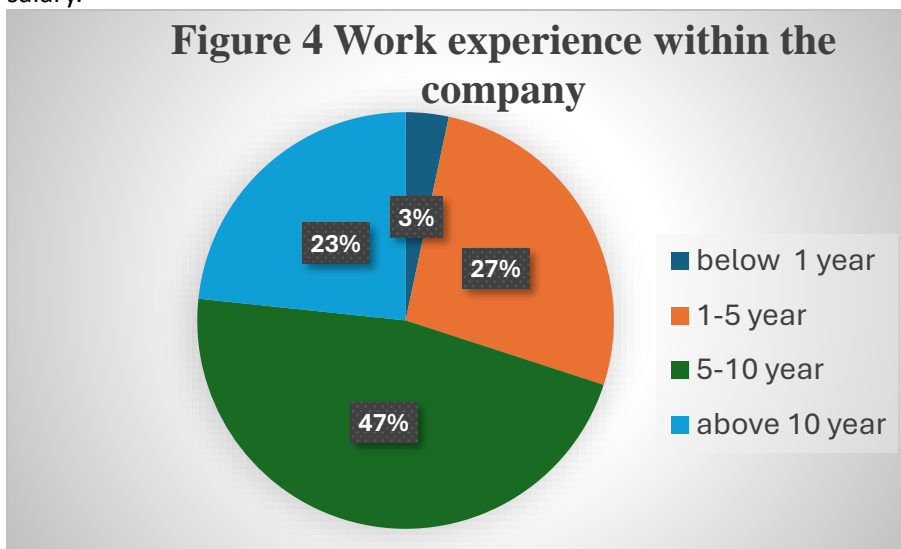
Source: Primary Survey

Figure 2: Showing the educational qualification of respondents. The maximum number of respondents have completed their SSLC and they form 60% of the total number of respondents. Only 7% of the total respondents have completed their post-graduation. This data is directly related with the fact that most of the respondents were cleaning staff and processing workers with low educational access. 13% of them even haven't completed 10th grade. The ones with graduation and post-graduation are employed in more responsible positions like quality control or quality assurance or even in accounting roles. A few are engaged in supervisory roles. Thus the educational qualification and their working role in the seafood processing industry are linked together.



Source: Primary Survey

Figure 3: Showing the number of income sources of the respondents. The number of income sources for majority of the respondents is one, which means the only income they obtain to sustain their life is the salary that they obtain from their respective seafood processing company. 97% of the respondents have only one income source. Thus their livelihood is totally dependent on this job. This is related with their response on salary satisfaction, where most of them are dissatisfied with their salary.



Source: Primary Survey

Figure 4 depicts how long have the respondents been working in the company. Many of the respondents are working for 5-10 years in the company. 3% of the respondents have been working below one year. 23% are working for more than 10 years. Many of them started working in the processing sector at a very young age, as a traditional part of job selection. Some continue to work

for long 10 years because the industry is near to their residence and they feel safe to work there. Others belong to the migrant group, who has been migrated to work in the industry at a very young age and continue to work there because they receive the basic facilities. Most of these people feel comfortable in their work environment and are satisfied with their job. The only flaw that they feel is about their salary. However, they continue to work in the same position, without feeling any need to get to more standard job levels in the industry.

Job Satisfaction

From the data obtained from table 1 explained that 70% of the respondents were satisfied with their job and only 7% were not satisfied. These 70% are mainly the processing workers who has been employed in the industry for long years. They are satisfied with their work environment, which provides them a positive attitude towards their work. 13% of the respondents have a neutral opinion regarding how satisfied they are with the job. This people experience a mixture of negativity and positivity from the work environment which makes neither like nor dislike their job.

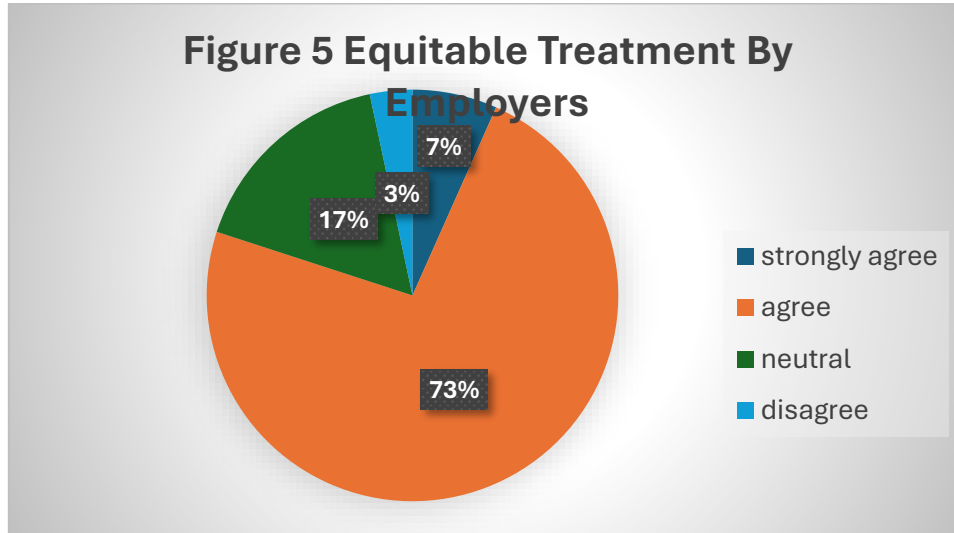
Table 1 Job satisfaction

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Satisfied	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Neutral	4	13.3	13.3	20.0
Satisfied	21	70.0	70.0	90.0
Very Satisfied	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary Survey

Nature Of Treatment by Employer

Figure 5 depicts respondents regarding the fair treatment of the employers on women workers. 73% of the respondents agree that their employer treats them fairly and respectfully and only 3% of them disagree with it. 17% of the respondents have a neutral opinion on the fair treatment from employers and 7% of them strongly agree that receive respectful treatment in the workplace.



Source: Primary Survey

Gender Discrimination

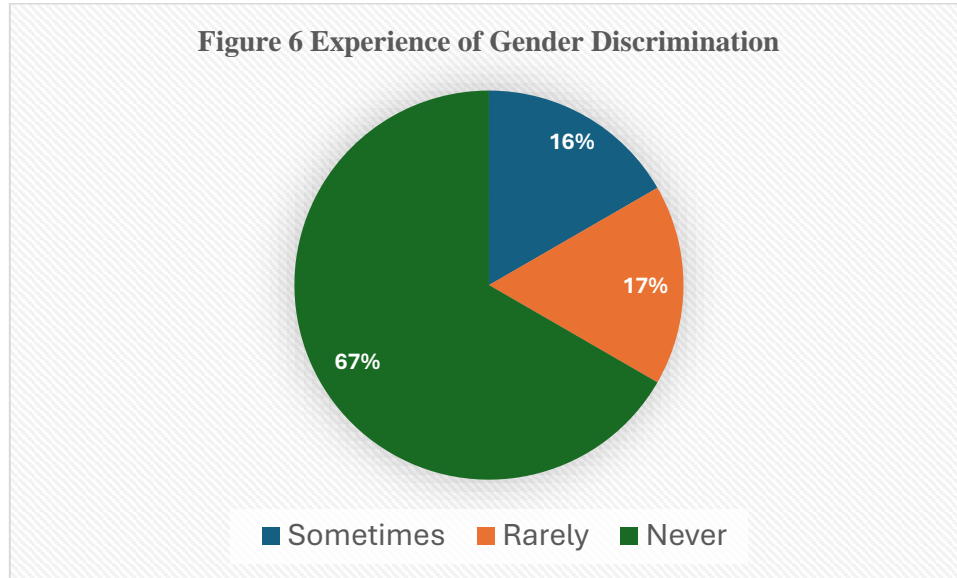
Gender discrimination refers to the unfair or unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender. This should not be promoted in any industry. So it was important to know on the views of respondents if they have faced any kind of discrimination from their workplace because of their gender. The responses were as following.

Table 2 Gender discrimination at workplace

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Sometimes	5	16.7	16.7	16.7
Rarely	5	16.7	16.7	33.3
Never	20	66.7	66.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary Survey

Table 2 and Figure 6 explains the incidence of gender discrimination in the workplace. 67% of the total respondents have never experienced any kind of gender discrimination in the workplace. Whereas, 16% of them have experienced it sometimes. The gender discrimination in seafood processing industry can be visualized very well on the low representation of women in the managerial and administrative level. Many of the workers are not giving much importance to this aspect. They are only responding based on whether they have felt ignored in their workplace because of being a women



Source: Primary Survey

. This is never experienced by majority of respondents. Even though, this aspect of gender discrimination is faced by 16% of the respondents at sometimes in their workplace. The highly educated respondents believe about the existence of gender inequality. However, they never responded to the situations or depth of gender discrimination. In the very small sample population of the survey at the very basic level, 16% of them experienced gender inequality sometimes. This provides an insight into how gender discrimination takes place at a broader level of population in the seafood processing industry. The workers should be made aware of this discrimination. Only then will they be able to express their concerns on this issue.

Safety Measures in The Workplace

Table 3 shows the response of respondents towards the safety measures in the company. 83% of the respondents are satisfied with the safety measures taken in their company, 10% of them are very satisfied and 7% of them have a neutral opinion regarding safety measures in their company.

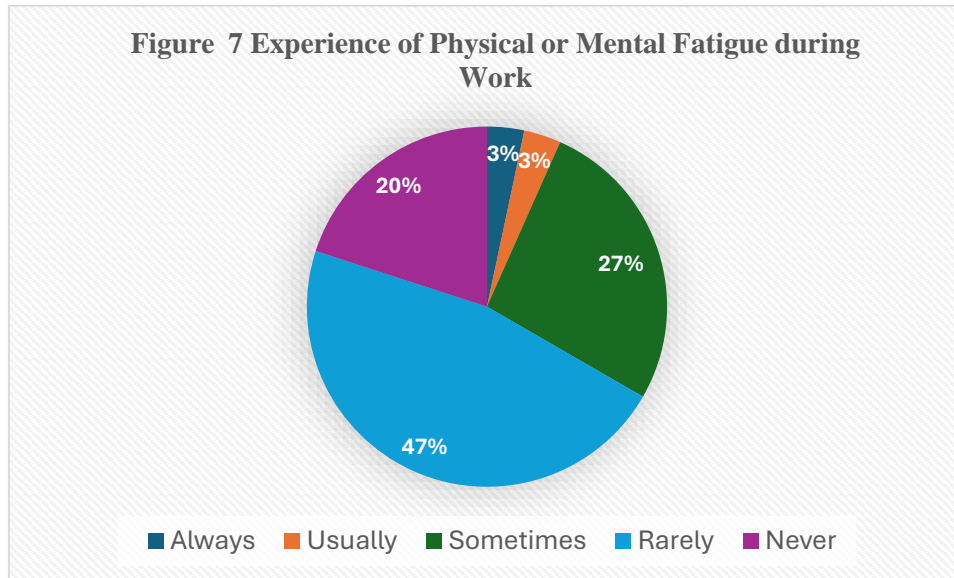
Table 3 Satisfaction of safety measures

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	neutral	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
	satisfied	25	83.3	83.3	90.0
	very satisfied	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary Survey

Physical Or Mental Fatigue Due to Work

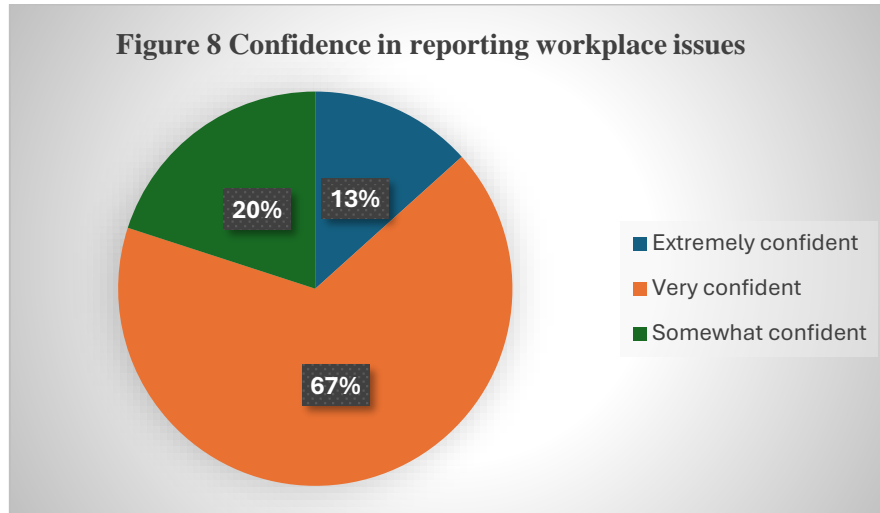
Physical or mental fatigue can be experienced due to long working hours and or may be due to aging. Figure 7 shows that 47% of the total respondents have rarely experienced any kind of fatigue due to their work. A 3% of them usually experiences and another 3% always experiences physical or mental fatigue due to their work.



Source: Primary Survey

Confidence In Reporting Workplace Issues

Figure 84 shows the level of confidence of the respondents in reporting any issues or concerns to the superiors. 67% of the total respondents are very confident and 13% of them are extremely confident in reporting any issues or concerns with the superiors. The issues or concerns maybe health and safety concerns, harassment or discrimination, violations of company policies or regulations or any other work-related problems that may affect the well-being or productivity of the employees.



Source: Primary Survey

. Having confidence to report workplace issues means that employees feel secure and supported in expressing their concerns without fear of retaliation or negative consequences. It indicates the positive organizational culture that encourages open communication, values employee feedback and takes appropriate actions to address the reported issues. 13% of them are extremely confident in reporting issues to the superiors. Thus, a healthy work environment is maintained in the industry with a good flow of communication enabled.

Salary Satisfaction

Table 3 examined that 83% of the total respondents are not satisfied with their salary, 10% of them have a neutral opinion and the remaining 7% are very dissatisfied. This is because all the respondents receive a monthly salary less than RS 20000. Most of the respondents depend upon this salary to sustain their livelihood. The dissatisfaction with their salary suggests that the workers feel their pay does not adequately reflect their contributions, efforts, or the value of their work. Living expenses are increasing day by day. Thus salary should also be incremented to meet the daily expenses. It is better to conduct a salary response survey by superiors of the company to understand the views of the workers regarding their salary. This can reduce the after effect of salary dissatisfaction by the workers.

Table 3 Salary Satisfaction

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Dissatisfied	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Not Satisfied	25	83.3	83.3	90.0
Neutral	3	10.0	10.0	100.0

Total	30	100.0	100.0
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Source: Primary Survey

Transportation And Accommodation Facility

The surveyed data examined that 73% of them answers that their company provides transportation facility, the question is not applicable for 20% of them, since they are in no need of using the transportation. 7% of them does not receive transportation facility from their company. Some of them stays in the company hostel, which makes them not applicable to use the transportation. The primary survey showed that 54% of the respondents responds “yes” and 13% of them says “no”. The question is not applicable in case of 33% of the respondents, which means they don’t require accommodation facility provided by the company. This is mainly because they have a travelable distance to their residential area.

Health Insurance and Other Benefits Provided By The Company

70% of the respondents receives one or other kind of benefits mainly in the form of ESI and PF. The remaining 30% answers that they don’t receive any such benefits.

Table 4 Health benefit availability

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
no	9	30.0	30.0	30.0
yes	21	70.0	70.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary Survey

Maternity Benefits

With the objective to provide maternity leave and benefit to the women employee, the Maternity Benefit Bill was passed by both Houses of Parliament and it received the assent of President on 12th December, 1961.it came to be known as MATERNITY BENEFIT ACT, 1961. According to this act maternity leave is provided by all the surveyed seafood processing companies. The maternity benefits provides financial and job security to the women workers during and after pregnancy. Thus the maternity benefits encompass the protection against discrimination or job loss due to pregnancy, as well as access to health care services specific to pregnancy and childbirth. This ensures the participation of women in the sector by considering their physical needs. Table 5 showed that 87% of the respondents know about the maternity benefits provided by their company.

Table 5 Maternity benefit

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sometimes	4	13.3	13.3	13.3
	yes	26	86.7	86.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Source: primary survey

Menstruation Leave

Table 6 showed that 93% of the respondents say that their company hasn't provided any menstruation leave, whereas, 4% of them has received it and 3% say that menstruation leave is sometimes provided. As the frequency table indicates, 28 of them said their company does not

Table 6 Menstruation leave

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	28	93.3	93.3	93.3
	sometimes	1	3.3	3.3	96.7
	yes	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

provide menstruation leave.

Conclusion

The assessment of working quality and challenges faced by women in seafood processing industry reveals the job satisfaction of workers with a safe working environment without much gender discrimination, devoid of un-respectful treatment. The good working environment promotes career growth and professional development. They feel a safe working environment to perform their duties effectively, leading to higher productivity and job satisfaction. Adequate safety measures and regulations ensure their physical well-being. The women are provided with adequate training and skill development opportunities and basic health benefits are also provided. The three acts mentioned in a court verdict in 1998, namely, The Employees State Insurance Act, The Employees Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provision Act and The Maternity Benefits Act are followed by the companies, where the workers are benefited by ESI, PF and maternity benefits. Menstruation leave is not encouraged by any of the three companies. From the results it is clear that many of the workers are unaware about the basic regulations prevailing in the company. Some of them are unaware about the rights that should be granted to them as per the law. This study highlighted that there is absence of

sustainable HRM of an organized system which can provide knowledge to the workers, especially women based on their rights. No special allowances are provided for women other than maternity benefits. Menstruation leave is a factor to be considered which is not promoted in seafood processing industry. There should exist an organized system to understand the problems faced by women workers and to acknowledge women on their rights in seafood processing industry. Briefly more efforts are required to improve their working condition and development of more policies are required to provide them to achieve higher and responsible positions in the industry. Ultimately, this study emphasize the significance of sustainable human resource management of seafood industry by fostering a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

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