

Characterizing the Well-Being of Oregon Commercial Fishers: A Mixed Methods Study

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Health and Safety in Commercial Fishing



One of the most dangerous occupations in the U.S. with various physical and psychosocial hazards.

- High risk of fatal and nonfatal injuries.^{1, 2}
 - **2010-2014:** The average fatality rate in U.S. fishing fleets was 21-147 deaths per 100,000 Full-time Equivalent (FTE).¹
- Sleep deprivation, and stress (particularly from fisheries management) are common.^{3, 4}
- Potential for work-family conflict.⁵

1. Lucas, D. L., & Case, S. L. (2018). 2. Bovbjerg, V. E., Vaughan, A. M., Syron, L. N., Jacobson, K. R., Pillai, S., & Kincl, L. D. (2019). 3. Eckert, C., Baker, T., & Cherry, D. (2018). 4. Sorensen, J., Kincl, L., Weil, R., Dzugan, J., & Christel, D. (2022). 5. Zvonkovic, A. M., Solomon, C. R., Humble, A. M., & Manoogian, M. (2005).

Focus on Worker Health, Safety, and Well-being

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) working toward a healthier U.S. workforce.

- **2011:** Total Worker Health (TWH) Approach integrates protection from health and safety hazards and the promotion of injury and illness prevention to improve well-being.
- **2018:** Worker Well-Being Framework.
- **2022:** Worker Well-Being Questionnaire (WellBQ).

Measuring and characterizing worker well-being across occupations is a priority research area.⁷



7. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. (2016).

Research Objectives and Aims



Objective

Investigate the utility of the WellBQ for measuring commercial fishers' well-being.



Specific Aims

1. Describe the worker well-being of commercial fishers.
2. Explore the validity of the NIOSH WellBQ with commercial fishers.
3. Disseminate results to stakeholders.

Project Overview



Participants

Purposive and snowball sample of Oregon commercial fishers ($n = 9$).

- 6 Captains/Owners + 3 Deckhands.
- 1 female + 8 male fishers.
- Average age: 46.2 years old (range 25-68).
- Experience: >20 years (4); 6-20 years (3); or 1-5 years (2).
- Newport, OR (6); Garibaldi, OR (2); and Kodiak, AK (1).



Activities

- Administer NIOSH WellBQ (paper/online).
- Conduct follow-up semi-structured interviews (in-person/phone/video conference).

Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your experience with the Well-being Questionnaire?
2. How would you define well-being?
3. How does your work as a commercial fisherman affect your well-being?
4. Can you describe a memorable moment when your work affected your well-being?
5. What do you think are the top three things about your work or life that positively (and negatively) affect your well-being?
6. Do you have anything else you wish to share [i.e., recommendations]?

Facilitators of Positive Work Experience are Key

“The **teamwork** that goes into a deck crew is—is the most important thing because along with that comes not just **mental stability and health** and, you know, good times and all that, but **physical [health]** as well because **somebody's always there to help you**. I mean, there's guys when somebody gets up to go out on deck on some boats, guys just get up there and follow him to see if he needs a hand or to keep an eye on him if he's going to go take a leak at the rail or something like that, you know. It's dangerous out there . . .”

- Captain, >20 Years in Industry

- **Crew relationships.**
- Family support and time.
- Ability to provide food to family, friends, and community.
- Get to be own boss/independence.

Barriers to Positive Work Experience as well

- **Regulations.**
- Lack of sleep.
- Overexertion/physical toll.
- Living paycheck to paycheck/irregular income.

“It's a cumulative thing of **regulations** from all different angles. When the reason we got into fishing in the first place was to be independent, you know. If you have a bunch of outside influences, telling you what you can and can't do, you **lose your independence**. It—it might be an archaic way to look at things, but it's . . . a fact of life. At least for a 68-year-old guy, has been in all . . . his is life.”

- Captain, >20 Years in Industry

Recommendations from Participants

A desire for resources to support fishers' work and health.

“If we could do **something to attract better crew, better fishermen**, then I think we would have an easier job number one . . . if you had a **better perception in the public for what fishermen are**, I think you would have more people wanting to do that.”

- Captain/Owner/Deckhand, >20 Years in Industry

“I think that would be the biggest thing is, spreading some sort of resources to these fishermen, like help with **food** if they need it, or help with **gear** if they need it, or maybe even just resources of **places to go that they can—can talk**, you know. Or . . . or . . . I don't know. I'm trying to think of the word for it, but maybe some—just some **more resources for the fishermen in general**.”

- Deckhand, 1-5 Years in Industry

“A lot of fishermen don't know **how to market** . . . if there is an agency or somebody who markets the—the local fish better for the—for the fishermen, you know . . . it would solve a lot of problems for a lot of fishermen.”

- Owner, 11-20 Years in Industry

Fishing Partnership Support Services (FPSS)

Non-profit organization in Massachusetts that provides services, such as:

- Assistance with Health Insurance.
- Safety training (e.g., first aid and Narcan).
- Financial planning.

FISHING PARTNERSHIP



SUPPORT SERVICES



HEALTH & WELLNESS



SAFETY AT SEA

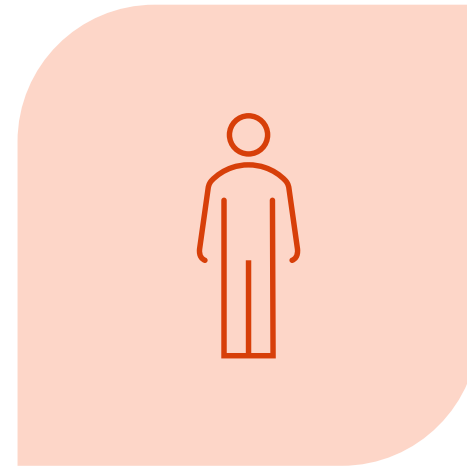


ECONOMIC SECURITY

Limitations



Small sample not representative of the commercial fishing industry.



Limited input from fishers who left the industry.

Future Directions

- Outreach for dissemination of study findings and recommendations.
- Build community networks of resources to support commercial fishers' health, safety, and well-being.
- Administer WellBQ with a larger sample of fishers to better characterize well-being needs.



Thank You!

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