

GENDER ROLES AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH RISKS TO WOMEN DRIED FISH PROCESSING WORKERS: A CASE OF NAZIRARTEK, BANGLADESH

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This study examines gender roles and occupational health in the dried fish processing sector of Nazirartek, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh—one of the country's largest dried fish production sites. Grounded in a feminist political ecology (FPE) framework, the research explores how governance structures and khola (yard) level management practices shape the gendered division of labour and influence health outcomes among workers, especially women. Using ethnographic methods, the study draws on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews, and oral histories to capture the lived experiences and intersectional vulnerabilities of both men and women engaged in fish processing. Findings reveal a stark gender divide in roles and responsibilities. Women are overwhelmingly concentrated in physically demanding, low-paying jobs with little or no control over working conditions, while men dominate supervisory and managerial positions that come with greater security and decision-making power. This asymmetry not only reinforces existing social hierarchies but also results in unequal exposure to occupational health risks. Women face a range of health hazards, including prolonged exposure to the sun, inadequate access to clean water, lack of sanitation facilities, and absence of protective equipment. These risks are further exacerbated by socio-cultural norms around menstruation, pregnancy, and childcare, which are neglected in workplace policies and infrastructure design. Moreover, women's exclusion from formal decision-making processes and the lack of collective bargaining power further limit their ability to negotiate safer, more equitable working conditions. The study calls for the urgent implementation of gender-responsive governance reforms, including recognition of women's informal labour, improved workplace infrastructure, and participatory mechanisms that include women in decision-making. Policy interventions must move beyond surface-level welfare initiatives to address the structural inequalities that underpin poor occupational health and safety standards in the sector. Strengthening institutional accountability and ensuring targeted support for women workers are essential steps toward building a more just, inclusive, and sustainable small-scale fisheries sector in Bangladesh.