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## Marine Policy

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# Acknowledging the voice of women: implications for fisheries management and policy

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 12 April 2016

Received in revised form

20 April 2016

Accepted 20 April 2016

## Keywords:

Fishermen

Wives

Resilience

Social networks

Fisheries management

Local knowledge

## ABSTRACT

Commercial fishing research often focuses on ecological (gear, stock-assessment, traceability) or economic factors or indicators. Truly understanding the social-ecological system requires considering the social, cultural, historical, and legal/policy aspects as well. Although regulatory bodies now include human dimensions in their management plans, there are still challenges to integrating social science into the decision-making process. There is a national and international understanding that if resource managers are to understand and develop strategies for coastal resilience, a holistic approach is needed that includes an understanding of the intersection between the dynamics of fisheries management and women's participation within fishing. The objective of this study was to collect oral history data related to past and current strategies for addressing fishing family and community resilience over time. Literature has documented ways in which limited access and catch share programs affect fishing community resilience and sustainability, but have few data that look at how these management systems may be affecting women's roles and participation within the industry. The results from this research adds to the literature on women's roles in the US and provide needed attention to their contribution to the well-being, resilience, and adaptive capacity of Oregon's evolving commercial fishing industry.

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## 1. Introduction

Currently, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act (MSA) (16 U.S.C. §1851(2)(8)) requires a fishery impact statement (FIS) for all management actions to document potential and realized ecological, social, and economic impacts to fishing communities. This legal framework requires managers to go beyond addressing ecological impacts independent of its human components to include human dimension analysis, or social impact assessments (SIA).<sup>1</sup> SIAs look at how communities are or could be affected by changes in management by predicting changes in well-being of the individual, family, or community [1]. SIAs have been conducted using a variety of mixed methods including both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A remaining challenge is how to communicate critical qualitative findings to managers and policymakers in a way that can be interpreted for policy needs [2]. The following case study identifies additional social measures of vulnerability and resilience that can be included in SIAs to create a more comprehensive picture of the community's needs and values.

One method of expanding the knowledge and applicability of human dimensions in fisheries is through the use of oral histories and semi-structured interviews [3,4]. Oral history methods are a way to collect data that can be used to document extensive information, including changes over time. They can be used to provide contextual information for quantitative results derived from community impact assessment surveys to help guide management and policy [3]. Through the use of oral histories, scientists can gain a better understanding of well-being at the individual, family, and community level as a result of changing regulations [4]. Semi-structured interviews share similarities with the oral history methodology, but encourage the participant to focus their story around a specific topic or issue.

The concept of fishing community well-being is often defined by fisheries social scientists as an indicator of job satisfaction and integral to the fisheries SIA model [1]. Well-being frameworks have also been more thoroughly defined to include the physical, social, and political environments that lead to one's way of life or personal identity [6,7]. Blount et al. [5] conceptualized well-being as a function of resilience and vulnerability levels (i.e., communities with low resilience and high vulnerability have lower well-being). Significant attention has been provided by fisheries social scientists in defining vulnerability and resilience (e.g., [8–17]). Tuler et al. [9] defines vulnerability as “a function of the stresses

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<sup>1</sup> Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment. (n.d.) Retrieved May 21, 2015, from [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/social\\_impact\\_guide.htm](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/social_impact_guide.htm).

people experience and their ability to cope with them.” Those ‘stresses’ are constructed via institutions, gender, ethnicity and class, and labor relations [8], which vary by individuals and communities and require place-based research. Social resilience, defined by Adger [18], is “the ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political, and environmental change.” Understanding how communities adapt to change and what tools may lead to resilience can help resource-managers minimize impacts to resource users when implementing new policies.

A recently understudied yet important factor is women's contribution to commercial fishing at the family and community level. There is a national [13,14,19,20] and international [21–25] understanding that if resource managers are to understand and develop strategies for coastal resilience, there is a need for a holistic approach that includes an understanding of the intersection between the dynamics of fisheries management and women's participation within fishing industry. This research directly addresses this intersection by helping fill gaps in the literature around women's participation in US West Coast fisheries. The objective was to collect oral history data related to past/current strategies for addressing fishing family and community resilience over time.

### 1.1. Sociocultural impacts of catch share programs

To deal with the issue of overexploitation of ocean resources and the increase in industrialized fishing practices, global fisheries management has transitioned to the neoliberal model or “market-based resource regulation” [26] of economic efficiency and privatization of ocean resources [27,28]. The most common form of privatizing fishing rights is that of individual quotas or ‘catch shares’, created by dividing a federal stock assessment measure or ‘total allowable catch’ (TAC) of a specific species into smaller allocations, which are distributed to participants in the fishery [27]. How the catch shares are distributed varies by fishery and is determined by the regional Fisheries Management Council, but often results in numerous ecological and social impacts [29].

Catch share programs are implemented to achieve biological goals and increase economic profitability and efficiency through consolidation of fishing fleets. Although they have indeed generated wealth for the recipients of fishing rights [28], they have also led to shifting social relationships, and substantial barriers to entry [28,30,31]. Literature continues to document the ways in which limited access and catch share programs affect fishing community resilience and sustainability [25, 28–30, 32]. Few have looked at how these quota systems may be affecting women's roles and participation within the industry; even fewer document impacts in the Pacific Northwest.

A recent example of this type of regulatory change was the implementation of the West Coast Groundfish Trawl Catch Share Program in 2011. Current research is being conducted by NOAA Fisheries to evaluate social impacts from the transition to catch shares management in the groundfish fishery [31]. This research takes a closer look at the role of women in adapting to this impact and other market- and management-driven changes on the Oregon coast.

### 1.2. Women's roles in an evolving industry: A review

Most of the recent literature on women's roles in the fishing industry addresses gender issues of visibility in the Global South [7,33,34]. The Asia Fisheries Society and Global Symposium on Gender and Fisheries has brought increased attention to fisherwomen in the Global South and their economic and cultural contribution to the value chain [22, 34–37]. Continued research attempts to analyze post-harvest and household support activities

when addressing gender issues of visibility, but there is still additional need “to increase women's voice in the sector in general, and their participation in fisheries governance” [33]. This remains true for women involved in US commercial fishing industries.

A vast majority of the literature on women's roles in the industrialized maritime industries occurs from mid-1980 to late-1990 [20, 38–48]. Furthermore, a diverse set of literature on this topic has come from fishing communities in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia [32,39–41,48–52], and is now outdated. Common themes focused on caring for the maritime household, the family, and handling the financial aspects of the fishing business. As a result of regulatory changes in the northeast fisheries, an increase in women's advocacy roles led them further into the political sphere.

More recent studies have come from regions such as Northern Europe [13,21,25] and can be used as guiding frameworks for recognizing the role of women in US fisheries as regulations evolve. However, much of the this literature focuses on women in the processing sector, becoming participants in the extractive sector, and taking on other occupational roles within the industry.

Although some research has addressed the impacts of catch share policies on women's roles, a place-based approach is needed as management programs vary and individuals and communities are affected differently. In the case of Northern England, Zhao et al. [25] mention a “renegotiation of roles between men and women” due to impacts of a quota system, which caused women to take on additional jobs to provide for the household. Another trend documented by Zhao et al. supports previous research from the Northwest [53] that fishermen's wives are becoming more politically involved as regulations increase in complexity. In a study of the US halibut fishing community, Carothers [54] showed trends of women taking on ownership roles in the fishery by purchasing quota. As women become empowered through active participation within these management programs their roles are likely to continue to change. It then becomes increasingly important to look beyond the simplistic view of women as housewives and incorporate women's experiences and knowledge into the decision-making process.

Ultimately, there is a need for more research around shifting regulations and its potential impacts on women's involvement in state, regional, or national commercial fisheries over time. There are current gaps in knowledge about how women's roles have evolved with the implementation of individual transferable quotas (ITQ's) and other market- and management-driven changes. One way to contribute to this set of knowledge is through the use of oral history data, which contribute to fisheries social science through an innovative approach that strengthens the “voice of women” in a subset of Oregon's coastal fishing communities.

### 1.3. Voices from the West Coast

Voices from the West Coast (VFWC) was created in 2013 to add to NOAA's ‘Voices from the Fisheries’<sup>2</sup> oral history database by contributing stories from Washington, Oregon, and California. VFWC is a collaborative project with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NOAA/NWFSC), Oregon State University (OSU), and Newport Fishermen's Wives (NFW).

This research contributes to the larger VFWC project by adding a subset of interview questions specifically related to women's

<sup>2</sup> Voices from the Fisheries: About the Project. (n.d.). Retrieved May 21, 2015, from [http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/voicesfromthefisheries/about\\_the\\_project.html](http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/voicesfromthefisheries/about_the_project.html).

“The Voices from the Fisheries Database is a powerful resource available to the public to inform, educate, and provide primary information for researchers interested in our local, human experience with the surrounding marine environment”

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