



Fishing as therapy: Impacts on job satisfaction and implications for fishery management



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 July 2016

Received in revised form

29 January 2017

Accepted 22 February 2017

Keywords:

Fisheries
Job satisfaction
Well-being
Northeast U.S.
Caribbean

1. Introduction

Consideration for the well-being of natural resource users is one regarded as an integral part of ecosystem-based policy strategies to conserve natural resources and maintain essential ecosystem services (Bowen and Riley, 2003; UNEP, 2006; Abunge et al., 2013; Daw et al., 2016). In the United States, National Standard 8 of the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996 requires that potential adverse socio-economic impacts to communities resulting from the implementation of management strategies be explicitly considered and minimized (MSFCMA, 2007). The past decade has seen increased effort by fishery social scientists to understand and operationalize human dimension factors influencing fishery policy and management, including individual and community well-being (Smith and Clay 2010; Coulthard et al., 2011; Weeratunge et al., 2014; Daw et al., 2011; Armitage et al., 2012; Pollnac and Poggie,

2008). The concept of well-being has often been associated with financial status and measured objectively using variables such as income per capita and education level, however there is an emerging consensus that such objective measures alone are poor indicators or predictors of well-being. Here we adopt a broader definition of well-being; one that includes individual perceptions of happiness and satisfaction with their lives.

Job satisfaction is a significant aspect of individual and community well-being in general (Pollnac et al., 2008, 2011) and especially among fishers. Aspects of the occupation of fishing such as “adventure,” “freedom,” and “being outdoors” have been linked to high levels of job satisfaction among fishers worldwide (Apostle et al., 1985; Binkley, 1995; Pollnac and Poggie, 1988, 2008; Pollnac et al., 2008). High levels of job satisfaction are, in turn, associated with strong attachment to and reluctance to leave the occupation of fishing even in the face of economic hardship, a finding supported by several recent studies (e.g., Crosson, 2014; Pascoe et al., 2015; Sweke et al., 2016; Trimble and Johnson, 2013). This reluctance coupled with other important social attributes (e.g. age and education) make it more difficult for fishers to seek and obtain alternative employment outside the fishing industry. As Sweke et al. (2016) note, this in combination with environmental transformations associated with human impacts such as stock depletion and climate change pose important and increasing challenges for fishers and policy-makers alike in many parts of the world.

Collaborative approaches that take into account stakeholders' well-being and basic needs are associated with more effective natural resource management strategies as these are perceived to be fairer, resulting in higher levels of acceptance and compliance (Kildow et al., 2014). Thus, increasing our understanding of aspects of well-being among fishers and their attitudes toward their occupation in different geographic areas, allowing for an investigation of the commonalities that unify fishing peoples as well as their differences, will contribute to the development of more appropriate, case-specific, and robust strategies for the

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conservation and management of marine resources in the future. This study presents unique comparisons, across space and time, regarding aspects of fishers' perception of their job satisfaction and well-being between two geographic areas where fishing constitutes an integral part of the local economy and culture: the Northeast Region US and the Caribbean.

Examining differences in aspects of job satisfaction and well-being in such highly different environments (both human and natural) will provide information for developing models to understand how different stressors (e.g. changes in the natural, socio-cultural, economic and managerial environments) affect those whose livelihoods depend directly on fishery resources. Models elucidating relationships between environmental and anthropogenic changes and the well-being of resource dependent populations will provide indispensable input for the development of strategies that incorporate both natural and human objectives in preserving and maintaining essential ecosystem services.

2. Aspects affecting job satisfaction and well-being: Caribbean vs New England fishers

As part of a paper exploring stresses involved in the occupation of fishing, Pollnac et al. (2011) found that with regard to satisfactions in connection with their occupation, fishers in the Caribbean, except for Jamaica, were more satisfied with aspects reflecting social and psychological attributes such as social relationships and relaxed mental states than fishers from New England, United States. They interpret this as reflecting the Caribbean fishers' relatively short fishing trips in peaceful waters in contrast to the longer trips and more turbulent waters fished by the US fishers. They further suggest that their findings may be related to Griffith and Valdes-Pizzini's (2002) description of Puerto Rican fishers who consider their work as 'therapy', as healthy or a sport, in comparison with other occupations they had pursued. They write that fishers returning from other land-based work "return to the sea, to fishing, to work in a job that offers therapy for their disability or for the alienation accumulated during so many years of mindless, repetitive labor" (Griffith and Valdes-Pizzini, 2002: 32). Similarly, Glazier (2007) indicates that Hawaiian fishers employed in typical, land-based jobs commonly cite fishing as a primary means of escaping from the pressures and stresses of other types of work. Many years ago, Pollnac and Poggie (1980) and Pollnac and Ruiz-Stout (1977) also found that fishers from Costa Rica and Panama state that fishing is like a sport and that it is *suave* (smooth, soft).

In addition to the factors mentioned above, other aspects are believed to have contributed to the differences found in Pollnac et al. (2011) between Caribbean and New England fishers. In the past couple of decades, the Northeast Region of the US (Maine south through North Carolina) has been continuously affected by major changes in fishery management to address dwindling fish stocks, which has been shown to result in additional stresses among fishers in the region (Pollnac et al., 2015). These types of stresses, induced by coping with a restrictive management regime, are not present in the non-US Caribbean and are much less present in Puerto Rico, where management has been less restrictive and less coercive and where fishers have historically engaged in multi-species fisheries, have had greater latitude in adapting to restrictions, and have had coping strategies available, such as occupational multiplicity and value adding through petty commodity seafood marketing (Griffith and Valdes-Pizzini, 2002; Pérez, 2005). This fishing regulatory environment was much like New England fishers' experience in the late 1970s when the Fishery Conservation and Management Act (FCMA) was first passed. However, since the passage of the act in 1976, regulations governing New England fishers evolved to the rapidly changing, extremely complex and

Table 1
Distribution of fisher mean age and education across studied areas.

Location	Age	Education	N
S. New England	44.0	12.5	236
N. New England	45.3	12.4	86
Mid-Atlantic	46.8	12.6	156
Puerto Rico	44.6	9.5	47
Belize	46.3	5.7	31
Nicaragua	39.3	5.8	26
Dominican Republic	42.5	5.9	130
Jamaica	30.7	10.8	26
Point Judith 1977	33.9	11.8	79

increasingly restrictive system of single stock management, which exists today in the region. Such differences in managerial environments are likely to influence fishers' attitudes towards the activity, which are expected to result in differences regarding levels of job satisfaction and well-being.

In this paper, relationships using subjective job satisfaction and well-being variables were tested with new data from the Northeast (NE) Region US¹ and Southeast (SE) Puerto Rico. Though the main focus of the study was on comparisons of the SE Puerto Rican and NE Region US fishers, data from the late 1970s for one important New England port, Point Judith, Rhode Island, was used to provide a comparable historic context for the NE Region, and data from other Caribbean fisheries (Belize, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, and Jamaica) were used to provide a comparable context for the SE Puerto Rican fishery. Fishers in all areas studied were compared with regard to their levels of perceived job satisfaction and, in the foci areas, subjective overall well-being was analyzed in relationship to job satisfaction and important demographic variables. The primary objective of this study is to further investigate aspects affecting well-being of fishery resource users to inform the decision-making process of factors that may affect or contribute to the success of management strategies to conserve fish stocks worldwide.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample

Between 2009 and 2013 a total sample of 738 fishers was interviewed face-to-face in fishing communities in the NE Region U.S. (N = 478), SE Puerto Rico (N = 47), and four other non-U.S. Caribbean and Central American countries (referred to as the wider Caribbean sample) (N = 213). Additionally, a sample of 79 fishers interviewed face-to-face in Point Judith, RI in 1977 was used for a temporal comparison.

The surveys were conducted as part of separate data collection efforts in each area studied with the job satisfaction and well-being questions being posed consistently in all regions except when noted otherwise. Data on age and education of fishers interviewed was also collected for the entire sample (Table 1).

The NE Region US sample was obtained in various fishing ports (N~50) in the region between 2009 and 2010. The sampling technique used was an intercept approach at docks and places where fishers gathered. This sampling method was considered appropriate to obtain a representative sample of fishers in the locations studied because it maximizes response rates for hard-to-find individuals (Miller et al., 1997), such as crew, for whom no registry or comprehensive lists are available. For purposes of analysis, the NE

¹ NOAA Fisheries defines the Northeast Region U.S. as all coastal states from Maine to North Carolina.

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