

# Gender Roles and Occupational Health Risks to Women Dried Fish Processing Workers: A Case of Nazirartek, Bangladesh

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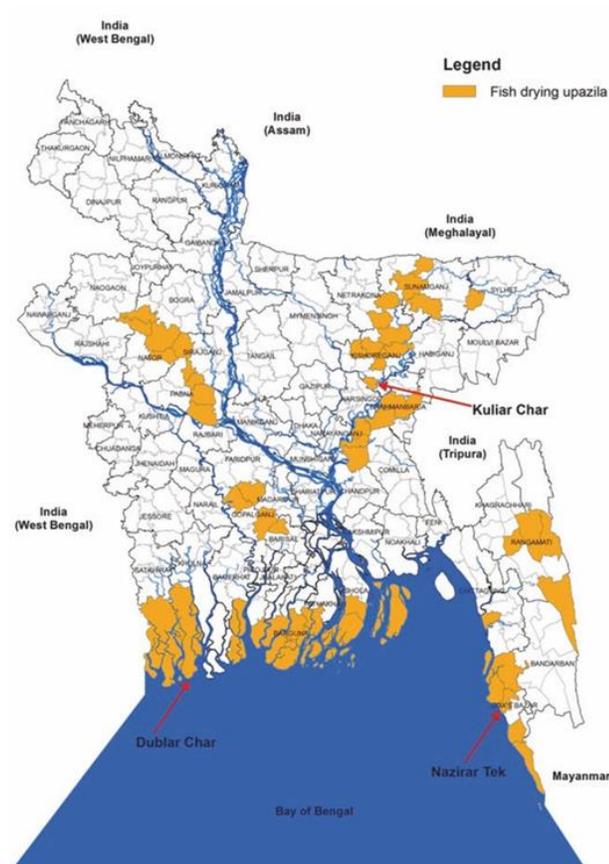
# Presentation Outline

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# Research Context: Dried fish in Bangladesh

- Dried fish makes up 10% of global fish production (FAO, 2020)
- Processed using a low-cost traditional method (Belton et al., 2022)
- 25% of national fish catch is processed into dried fish in Bangladesh (Belton et al., 2018)
- It carries cultural and culinary importance, central to traditional diets and local identity (Belton & Thilsted, 2014)



Location of fish drying sites in Bangladesh



# Research Context

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- Women are central to post-harvest activities like drying and processing, making up around 40% of the workforce in the aquatic value chain (FAO, 2024).
- Dried fish chains remain largely informal, with weak governance, poor labour protections, and limited health standards (Belton et al., 2022; Hossain et al., 2013).
- Existing research often overlooked the intersection of gender, labour, and health in dried fish value chains (Pedroza-Gutiérrez & Hapke, 2022).



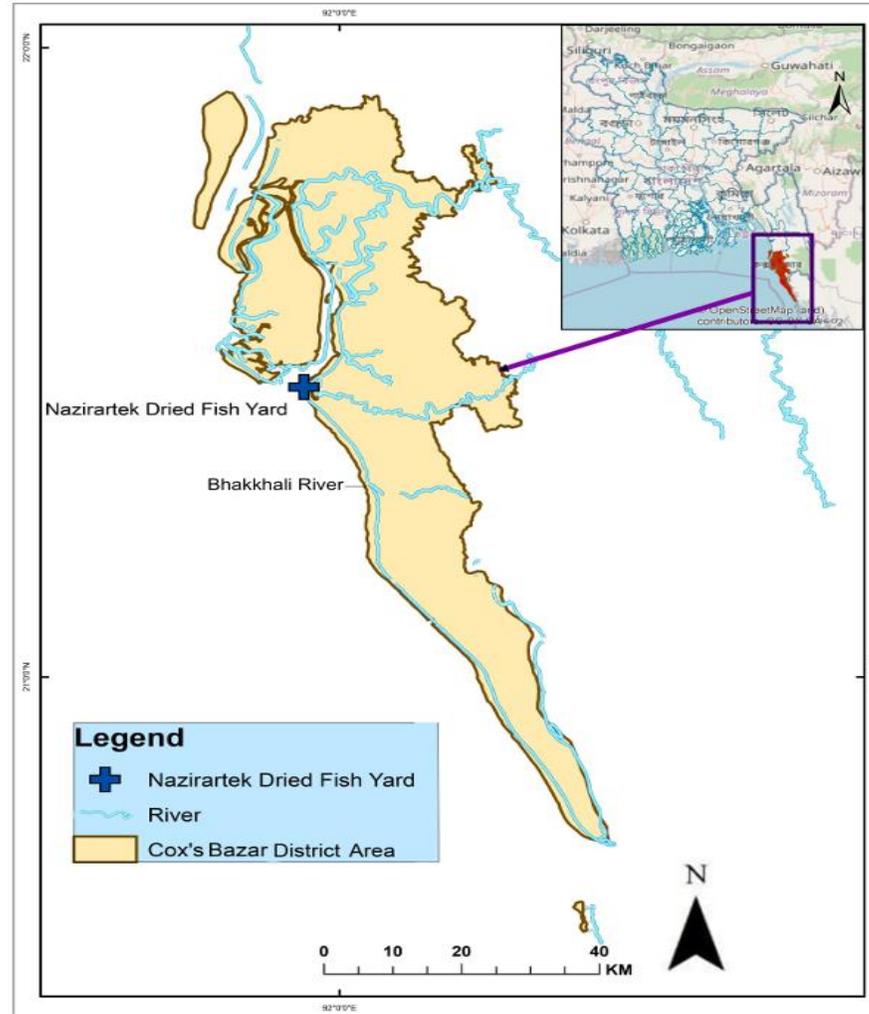
# Research Purpose & Objectives

**Purpose:** To investigate the gendered occupational health and hygiene provisions for the dried fish processing workers in Bangladesh

Specific objectives are to:

- map the intersectional and gender-differentiated occupational status, roles, and health in dried fish processing work
- examine the coping mechanisms processing workers regarding occupational risks; how they try to protect their health and rights

# Geographical Context - Nazirartek



# Research Design

- Qualitative Research using an Ethnographic Case Study Approach
- Feminist Political Ecology (FPE)
- Intersectionality



Tool	Number of Participants	Participants
Open-Ended Interviews	30	Bengali women fish processors (10) Rohingya women fish processors (5) Pregnant women (2) Adolescent girls (3) Majhi (women supervisors) (5) Male supervisors (5)
Key Informant Interviews (KII)	20	Dry fish traders/ khola owners (4) Dried fish association leaders (2) Women leaders and activists (4) Government officials (2) Local NGO representatives (4) Health professionals (2) Local govt. institute representatives (2)
Oral History	6	Bengali women fish Processors (2) Rohingya women fish processors (2) Pregnant women (2)

# Results

## Gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities in Nazirartek *khola*

Roles / Tasks	Women (Primary Labour Force)	Men (Supervisory & Market Roles)
Catching & Procurement	Not involved	Catch fish or buy from markets or boats
Transportation	Carry loads manually (on head or body)	Transport fish mostly using carts, sometimes manual effort
Fish Preparation	Lead role: sorting, gutting, binding, and cleaning	Occasionally help (mainly to monitor women)
Drying Process	Spread fish under the sun, monitor drying	Set up racks, hang fish at height
Packaging & Storage	Layer fish with care, assist in packaging	Pack for transport or market
Sales & Marketing	Rarely participate	Handle negotiations and buyer relations
Household Responsibilities	Full responsibility for cooking, cleaning, childcare	Rarely participate

# Gender Division of Labour (Women's Work)



# Gender Division of Labour (Men's Work)



# Patriarchal Oversight



Men oversee women's work in the dried fish *khola*, reflecting the entrenched patriarchal norms in Nazirartek



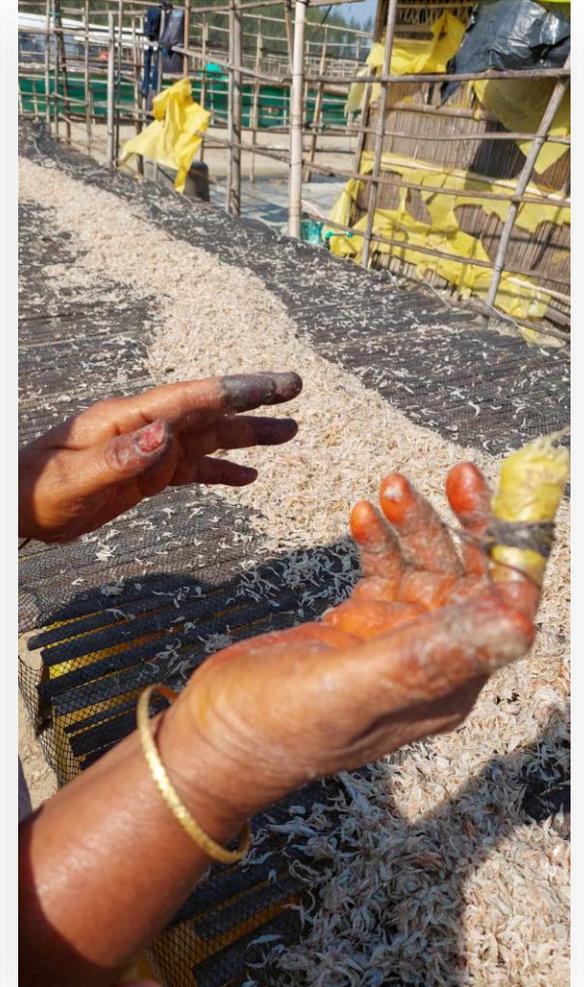
# Perceived gendered health Risks in Nazirartek Khola

*‘I work long hours without proper sanitation, and managing my period is difficult. If the owner finds out, I may be sent home for being “impure,” which adds stress and costs me the income my family depends on’*



Occupational Health Risk Scenario	Women (%) (n=20)	Men (%) (n= 11)
Chronic body pain (esp. back, shoulder, arms)	100	45
Persistent headaches	80	0
Urogenital issues (including kidney problems and urinary tract infections)	70	--
Frequent hand injuries (from fish scales and bones)	100	18
Skin ailments (esp. irritation due to salt exposure)	85	18
Climate-induced fatigue (due to prolonged exposure to the sun and other extreme weather)	90	45
Menstrual health complications	80	--
Pregnancy-related health concerns	20	--
Falls and injuries (due to heavy lifting, slipping from heights)	10	54

# Health Vulnerabilities

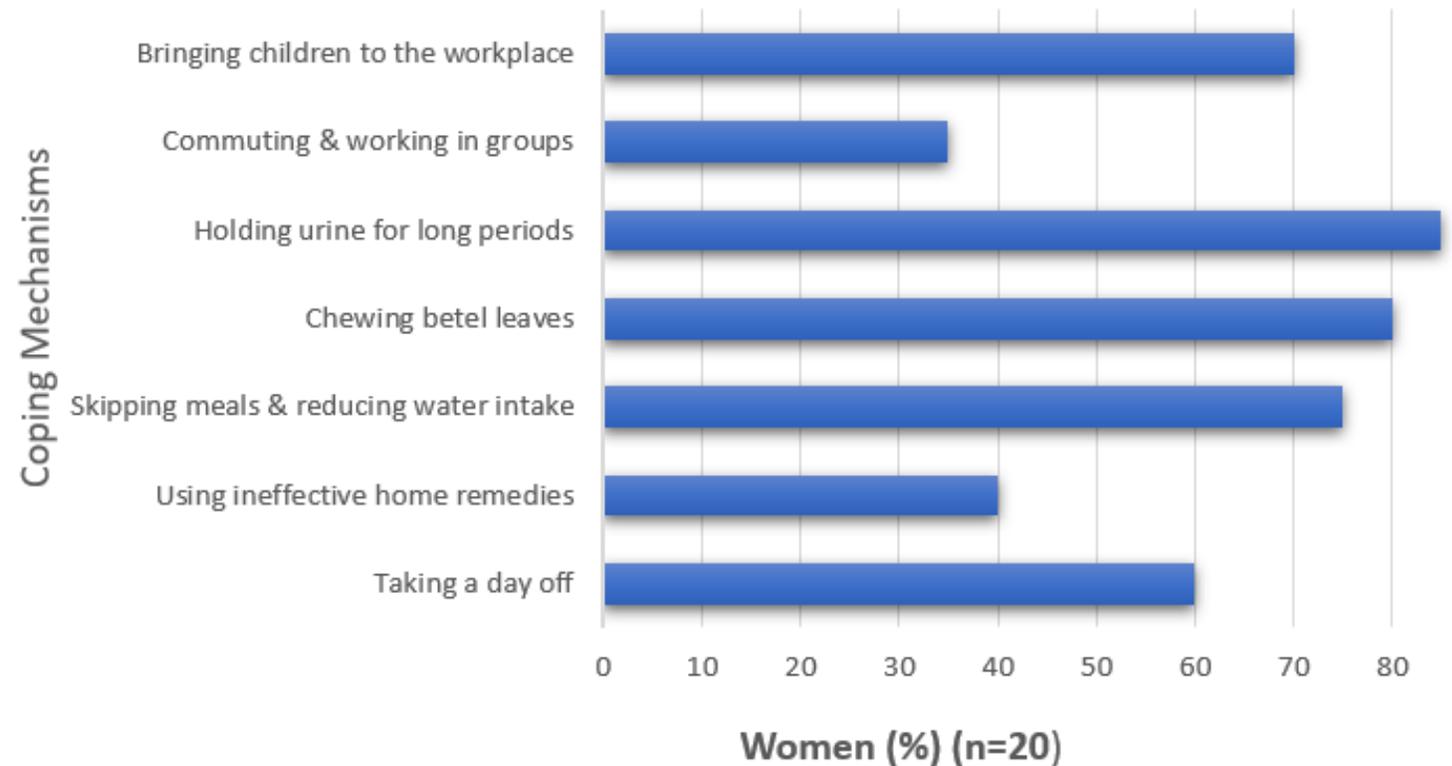


# Women's Coping Mechanisms

*'We deliberately drink less and hold our urine all day since using the toilet often means going home, which the owner may not permit. To cope with discomfort and thirst, we still chew betel leaves for a bit of relief'*



## Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Women Workers





Silence is more than avoiding confrontation - it is a coerced strategy for survival within a patriarchal system that discourages resistance

## Silence and Resistance

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*'If you have problems, you can leave. There are plenty of other women willing to take your place'*

*'If the owner finds out we are on our period, they do not allow us to work. So, we just keep quiet and manage whatever we can'*

*'Who will stand by us if we protest? No one! At least we can earn something by staying quiet'*

# Discussion

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- Patriarchal governance sidelines women from leadership, confining them to low-paid, labor-intensive roles (Galappaththi et al., 2021; Harper et al., 2017; Pedroza-Gutiérrez & Hapke, 2022).
- Women face strenuous, insecure work in unhygienic conditions, while carrying unpaid domestic burdens (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004; Jalali, 2021; Galappaththi et al., 2023).
- Gendered norms silence health concerns around sanitation and menstruation, creating unsafe workplaces (Jalali, 2021; Sultana, 2009; Salagrama & Dasu, 2021).
- Intersectional vulnerabilities (age, pregnancy, marital status) deepen risks, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive policies (Galappaththi et al., 2021; Aswathy & Kalpana, 2018).

# Policy Recommendations

A multifaceted policy approach, grounded in Feminist Political Ecology, is required to address the intertwined gendered labour dynamics, occupational health risks, and structural inequities

A. Nazirartek <i>Khola</i>	B. All Women Dried Fish Workers	C. All Dried Fish Workers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Inclusive local governance structures</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Promotion of women’s leadership and voice</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Recognition and formal inclusion of the sector</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Improvement of on-site infrastructure and services</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Equitable health and social services</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Strengthened occupational health and safety policies</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Localized enforcement of occupational health and safety policy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Sector-wide capacity building and rights education</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Support for economic diversification and resilience</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Community-level capacity building</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Transformative gender norm interventions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Public subsidies for sector-wide modernization</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Challenging gender norms in practice</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Use of media and digital platforms for awareness and innovation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Challenge harmful social norms and promote rights awareness</li></ul>

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THANK YOU

