

## Symposium: The Gendered Measurements of Slavery

Alice Eckstein, Project Director, Delta 8.7

15 March 2021

While it is generally known that [71 per cent of people](#) living in conditions of modern slavery, human trafficking, forced labour and child labour are women and girls, the various ways that gender bias are reflected in that number, and in other measurements of prevalence, are not immediately apparent. [Recent research examines](#) the ways that bias against women and girls from birth and throughout life render them more vulnerable to modern slavery than their male counterparts. In addition to looking at gendered vulnerability to modern slavery, Delta 8.7 wanted to examine how the measurements pertaining to modern slavery may reflect implicit gender bias. How does the collection of data reflect social understanding of what “labour” is, and what do large collections of administrative data say about how gender and gender expression is understood? Crucially, what story do researchers and statisticians tell about gender and modern slavery in these measurements, and what impact does that have on all victims and survivors of modern slavery – men and women, boys and girls?

In the following symposium, contributors examine these questions. From Walk Free, Davina Durgana discusses the collection of administrative data—those large-scale surveys that provide essential demographic information for vulnerability and risk assessments—and notes some recommendations for making the process of collecting such data more gender-inclusive. Jacqueline Joudo Larsen describes some ways that the gender of the data enumerator (and that of the respondent) can affect the collection of data related to sensitive matters pertaining to forced marriage and labour exploitation. Natália Suzuki, Thiago Casteli and Rodrigo Teruel from Repórter Brasil summarize a report on surveys of forced labour in Brazil that indicates measurements of forced labour can significantly mis-represent women’s experiences due to inherent bias in understanding domestic labour and labour within families. Juno Fitzpatrick and Elena Finkbeiner from Conservation International outline the prevalence of women’s labour in the fisheries sector, as well as the specific vulnerabilities and exploitation they face. Caroline Adhiambo’s contribution examines how social understanding of gendered vulnerability renders women and girls more likely to experience exploitation while denying men and boys who experience modern slavery the opportunity to seek, or receive, support.

All the contributions to the symposium can be found below:

### **A Feminist Statistician’s Perspective on Gendered Limitations of Administrative Data**

Davina Durgana, Walk Free Foundation

16 March 2021

### **The Role of Gender in Data Collection through Household Surveys**

Jacqueline Joudo Larsen, Walk Free Foundation

17 March 2021



**Slave Labour and Gender: Who are the Women Subject to Slave Labour in Brazil?**

Natália Suzuki, Thiago Casteli and Rodrigo Teruel, Repórter Brasil

*18 March 2021***Land and Sea: Gendered Nature of Labour and Sexual Exploitation in Fisheries**

Juno Fitzpatrick and Elena Finkbeiner, Conservation International

*19 March 2021***Gendered Measurements of Exploitation and Their Impact on Survivors**

Caroline Adhiambo, Survivor Leader

*22 March 2021*

All these contributions culminated in a virtual panel held on 25 March as an official Commission on the Status of Women side-event. The full recording of this event can be found [here](#).

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**Symposium: A Feminist Statistician's Perspective on  
Gendered Limitations of Administrative Data**

Davina Durgana, Senior Statistician, Walk Free Foundation

*16 March 2021*

[Measurement](#) in modern slavery, like all applied measurement efforts, requires careful consideration of potential measurement bias and error—especially given the primacy of administrative data in most aspects of our work in this space. Not only do researchers need **administrative data** to learn as much as possible about population demographics to ensure a representative survey can be planned but administrative data are also required for more direct analysis on vulnerability and risk assessments. Gender considerations in administrative data as they pertain to modern slavery research have significant impact on our research and resulting policy.

Discussing the impact of gender on administrative data requires a clear understanding of how administrative data impact our lives and why inclusivity in data collection is critical. Administrative data collection is an exercise in inclusion and exclusion of the key groups that comprise our societies. Accordingly, this process deserves the serious consideration of all key stakeholders to ensure that the data measurement infrastructure is as inclusive as possible. In this article, I will discuss the importance of intentional inclusivity in data systems and data collection processes particularly with respect to gender, race and broader socioeconomic characteristics. I will also outline the power structures implicit in data collection and measurement standards before summarizing policy and research recommendations that will help us to address these issues throughout all of our research.



### *Administrative data are a societal snapshot*

Administrative data tell the stories of our lives to those that may never meet nor learn any more about the complex contexts in which we live. Accordingly, administrative data are an often overlooked, but critically important component of contemporary research agendas. Administrative data serve as the starting point for our sampling frames for representative surveys to help us determine what final sample population would best represent the population of interest. Administrative data often serve as the sole data source for risk and vulnerability assessments in all domains, given their ubiquitous nature and coverage of many issues. Administrative data are also collected by local, regional, national and international bodies on almost all topics and with varying levels of statistical and data management capacity—from service providers’ records in the field to major statistical bodies at the United Nations.

Feedback loops in administrative data collection and publication are often non-existent, which means that even well-intentioned data collectors and researchers are often unaware of the populations they may be missing or misrepresenting. We, therefore, must be transparent and critical of these challenges and proactive in achieving more gender equitable data so that the policy informed by our work optimizes use of these data sources for the populations we are committed to serving.

For instance, with respect to the LGBTQAI+ community, both lack of consistent standards and even those current standards themselves, as well as data collection procedures on characteristics of gender identity and sexual orientation deprive us of meaningfully nuanced data on these populations. Without these data, policymakers and advocates are also unable to effectively advocate for the programs and interventions that will best serve these populations. As a solution, the Center for American Progress recommends that systematic data collection efforts should include three distinct but related variables for sexual orientation, namely self-identification, sexual behavior and sexual attraction. For gender identity, administrative data should include both gender identity and sex assigned at birth. Gender expression can include both appearance and mannerisms as distinct but related questions ranging from very feminine to very masculine. Finally, [preferred](#) name and gender pronouns should also be asked.

All populations benefit from greater inclusivity and intentionality in data collection and design. In developing evaluations of projects for children globally, UNICEF has created a gender data [strategic framework](#) to ensure that administrative systems can collect gender-related data of interest to key stakeholders and provide deeper analysis of these data. Furthermore, to adequately understand broader socioeconomic characteristics, such as education and income, we need the context provided by including gender considerations in administrative systems and analyses. The deep inequities that [women and girls](#) face globally along these dimensions, especially regarding income, educational opportunities and the toll of unpaid and often uncounted household labour, significantly inform their realities.



Finally, we must address the implicit power that those who set standards of measurement for administrative data and inform the collection procedures have in ensuring gender is mainstreamed in our data collection efforts from the outset. [Gender mainstreaming](#) is advocated by institutions around the world, including [UN agencies](#), to integrate a gender perspective into the design and implementation of policies and measures to promote equality between men and women. There is also significant influence in the definitions data collectors choose to employ and the measurement standards we uphold. The [International Conference of Labour Statisticians](#) helps to provide guidance on the key concepts and definitions that statisticians then integrate into their own systems locally. In the specific application of gendered considerations in measurement of modern slavery from administrative data, we must also consider how implicit biases from law enforcement, legislative and prosecutorial standards and public awareness campaigns may result in disproportionate amounts of male or female victims identified and included in resulting datasets.

Overall, administrative data reflects our world at all levels of our societies, and we must act to safeguard this invaluable resource and ensure that it reflects the world as it is for all populations, especially women and girls.

*This article has been prepared by Davina Durgana as a contribution to Delta 8.7. As provided for in the Terms and Conditions of Use of Delta 8.7, the opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UNU or its partners.*

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### **Symposium: The Role of Gender in Data Collection through Household Surveys**

Jacqueline Joudo Larsen, Criminologist and Head of Research, Walk Free Foundation

17 March 2021

Survey research allows us to enter the homes of millions of people around the world to uncover some of the most intimate aspects of people's daily lives. It is used to address some of the most challenging societal issues we face, including forced labour, forced marriage, drug use, gender-based violence and other hidden crimes. To measure the extent of these issues, people are often asked a series of sensitive questions by a stranger who comes to their door. It comes as no surprise that some information is more readily shared than other types of information. We've seen the challenges of this first-hand in our attempts to [measure modern slavery](#), particularly, forced sexual exploitation. Conducting this research requires careful integration of gender inclusive language and measurement standards in order to ensure that these resource-intensive and valuable measurement efforts are optimized and accurately reflect reality.

In modern slavery research, surveys represent a measurement gold standard when sampling strategies are built upon official statistics for stratified, probabilistic and random sampling.[1] Survey research represents a significant investment in time and financial resources, and is a rare opportunity to reach a broader population with questions related to modern slavery. Optimizing these opportunities benefits the entire field because it allows us to



reach **potentially unidentified** survivors and victims of modern slavery that may otherwise never be contacted. There are two main aspects of survey research and gender that will be discussed in this piece: gender considerations around enumerators or interviewers, and gender considerations around respondents.

### *Gender and survey enumerators*

Enumerators or survey research interviewers are a critical link in our global research chains. Enumerators are the sole researchers coming into direct contact with our research respondents, and everything about their personal characteristics, presentation and representation of the groups with which they are affiliated are known to affect whether survey respondents participate in the research project or whether their answers are influenced by the enumerator. Mismatched gender, among other sociodemographic characteristics, has been shown to affect unit and item [nonresponse in surveys](#).

Two main theories explain the impact of interviewer gender on responses. *Social distance theory* posits that when respondents and interviewers are the same gender, the response rate is higher and responses themselves are more accurate. For example, [research](#) suggests that interviewers obtain a greater number of responses to sensitive questions if they are the same gender as the respondent. *Social desirability theory* suggests that respondents will try and provide response that will be perceived favourably by the interviewer. [Studies have shown](#) that when female interviewers in the US and Mexico ask questions about gender equality, they are more likely to receive egalitarian responses. In the Arab states, responses to the same question were affected by both gender and religion (as denoted by the interviewer wearing religious dress).

There are also some interesting preliminary findings from one round of the [Arab Barometer](#), which show that interviews conducted by female interviewers tended to be approximately 4 minutes longer on average. More research is needed to ascertain whether the longer interview duration indicates a greater willingness among respondents interviewed by a female to discuss the issues or if female interviewers take more time to build rapport or ask questions. Additionally, it is unclear if either of these factors has an impact on the quality and accuracy of the information being collected.

In order to account for gender specifically affecting social desirability bias in survey administration settings, several efforts have advocated for gender-matching, but even this approach is not complete. There are [other substantial aspects](#) of an enumerator's background and presentation including cultural, socioeconomic and educational characteristics, that can also influence survey respondents and their willingness to participate and to provide honest responses.

### *Gender and survey respondents*



Importantly, the respondents that participate in our surveys are the source of all the insights that can be derived from this research. In addition to encouraging their participation, it is critical that we protect all survey respondents. Conducting research in the private homes of respondents is also fraught with many challenges, not only preserving safety but also access and considering who is permitted to speak on behalf of the household. Compounding this complexity is the reality that in many situations asking about forced marriage and about family members in forced labour may place respondents in potential situations of discomfort, if not outright risk, if their abusers live within the same household. Ethical standards and protections are often put in place to ensure that survey respondents are supported by local referrals and experts, as well as equipped with the necessary information to discuss their situation further if desired.

There are still serious challenges that must be dealt with, especially in cultures with strong patriarchal traditions where women may not be interviewed without a chaperone or witness. The presence of a third-party, which is sometimes a child or another family member who is curious about the process and wants to listen to the interview, is rarely coded or considered in final research analysis, yet this is likely to have a substantial impact on the respondent's willingness to report honestly. For example, in the Arab Barometer research mentioned above, when asked "Husbands should have final say in all decisions concerning the family", there was greater agreement when a third party was at the interview.

The impact of gender should also be considered in the cognitive testing part of the survey process to ensure that our language is inclusive and reflective of the societies we are studying. Ensuring that we provide equitable opportunity for male and female respondents to participate and that both understand the questions, can recall the information sought and are comfortable responding is critical. Gendered constructions of occupations, marital status and even the actual survey language itself underpin our ability to accurately measure the prevalence of all forms of modern slavery.

Gender inclusivity and considerations are critical in the survey research we undertake in the modern slavery field and beyond. For such significant investments, we have an obligation to ensure that our methods of data collection are not a barrier to participation for any members of a community, especially the world's most vulnerable women and girls.

*This article has been prepared by Jacqueline Joudo Larsen as a contribution to Delta 8.7. As provided for in the Terms and Conditions of Use of Delta 8.7, the opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UNU or its partners.*

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[1] Joudo Larsen, J & Okech, D (2021) Prevalence Estimation: Methods Brief – Method 01: Household Surveying. *Global Fund to End Modern Slavery*. Available from: <https://www.gfems.org/news/2021/2/10/resource-prevalence-estimation-methods-brief>



**Symposium: Slave Labour and Gender: Who are the Women Subject to Slave Labour in Brazil?**

Natália Suzuki, Coordinator of *Escravo, nem pensar!*, Repórter Brasil

Thiago Casteli, Project Advisor for *Escravo, nem pensar!*, Repórter Brasil

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18 March 2021

According to data from Brazil's Ministry of the Economy, only five per cent of the total number of people rescued from slave labour in Brazil are women. This relatively small number has contributed to the invisibility of women subjected to **slave labour** and, therefore, civil society organizations and government institutions have paid little attention to gender considerations in relation to this human rights violation.

The perverse result of this situation is that the specificities arising from the question of gender have remained obscured for decades and even disregarded by public policies dedicated to the eradication of slave labour in Brazil, thereby reinforcing gender inequalities.

Still, who are the female workers subject to slave-like conditions in Brazil? Where do they come from? What types of labour were they engaged in when they exited situations of slavery? Between 2003 and 2018, 47,760 workers were found in conditions analogous to slavery in Brazil. Of the total, 35,943 victims were registered in the database for the unemployment insurance granted to rescued people. Among them, only 1,889 were women. Of these, 62 per cent were either illiterate or did not complete the fifth year of elementary school.

There is also a relevant racial disparity among those rescued: more than half (53 per cent) are of African descent, of which 42 per cent are *pardo* (of mixed ethnic ancestry) and 11 per cent are black. They come mainly from the states of Maranhão (16.4 per cent), Pará (12.8 per cent), Minas Gerais (10.6 per cent), Bahia (10.4 per cent) and São Paulo (10.2 per cent). Like men, these women are in conditions of socio-economic vulnerability, which makes them more susceptible to labour exploitation.

This data is part of an unprecedented investigation by the non-governmental organization Repórter Brasil about the question of gender as it relates to the labour exploitation of female workers in the country. The study was carried out based on the inspection records of the Ministry of the Economy between 2003 and 2018. The results of the research are presented in the briefing, [Slave labour and gender: Who are the women subject to slave labour in Brazil?](#), which was produced by Repórter Brasil's education programme, [Slavery, no way!](#) (in Portuguese: *Escravo, nem pensar!*), with the support of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Like men, most women were found working in agricultural activities: 64.2 per cent of the total, corresponding to 1,212 women. They both partook in labour considered arduous and physically demanding, such as cutting sugar cane and producing charcoal, and engaged in domestic activities, such as cooking and cleaning, thereby reproducing the same logic of the sexual



division of labour entrenched in society at large. It is not coincidental that the second most recurring occupation for women subject to slave labour is that of cook.

*Domestic work and sex work are not perceived as labour*

Domestic activity is often not recognized as work. There have been cases in which the responsible authorities have identified domestic workers as merely relatives of exploited workers, who just happened to be at the site of exploitation accompanying their husbands, children or parents. This mistaken perception means that they are not considered workers and end up deprived of their labour rights, further aggravating their vulnerability and hindering their ability to re-establish their lives after exploitation, which reinforces gender inequality.

The problem of not recognizing the activities of the “care economy” as labour derives from a ubiquitous notion that the role and place of women belong to the private sphere. Therefore, it is “natural” (and not socially constructed) that women are held responsible for managing the home, which includes educating the children, caring for family members, especially the elderly and the sick, as well as household chores such as cooking, cleaning and ironing.

From the moment they enter the labour market, many women engage in activities in the spheres of education and care, such as social assistance and health. Once understood as an extension of women’s chores carried out in the private sphere, these professions are devalued socioeconomically, resulting in low salaries. This logic also extends to the perception of hired domestic workers. In Brazil, domestic work is poorly paid and informal. The number of cases of slave labour would be much higher if situations where girls and women spend their entire lives devoted to domestic work, living for years—often decades—in homes of families other than their own, in exchange for “favours”, such as housing and food, without receiving a single salary were identified and considered as cases of slave labour.

Work activities in which women are subject to slave-like conditions are only a reproduction of gender inequalities that are already rooted in society. Thus, the sexual division of work and the devaluation of women’s work are reproductions of stigmas, prejudices and asymmetries that are part of our daily relationships. More broadly, this invisibility has serious consequences, such as underreporting in official data of women subject to slave labour, which, in turn, makes difficult the elaboration of public policies that take gender into account.

The problem of underreporting also affects women who are exploited in sexual activities. There are known cases of sex workers in situations of slave labour, such as [the workers at a nightclub identified in 2010 in Mato Grosso](#). However, until 2018, there was no record in the slave labour inspection data where female workers are classified as “sex workers”. In such cases, they ended up being classified as “dancers” or “waitresses”. In some cases, the victims themselves do not wish to be identified as sex workers. In others, the authorities use other occupations so that the employment relationship can be established, and the indemnities and rights can be paid, as it is still common to perceive prostitution not as a labour activity for which labour rights are



guaranteed. The first record of an identified case of slave labour for the purpose of sexual exploitation took place only in 2019, in the [Operação Cinderela \(Operation Cinderella\)](#).

### *Women who stay*

Slave labour still impacts many women in another way. These are the so-called “widows of living husbands”, present in communities marked by seasonal migration, in which slave-like working conditions are frequently found. They are the wives of the workers who regularly leave for temporary jobs, staying away from home for several months. Often, neither the money arrives, nor does the worker return due to the migrant’s experience of exploitation. Alone, they assume the role of breadwinner along with all the responsibilities that arise from that position, such as the children’s education, and the care for and support of all other family members. In such situations, women are still victims of slave labour from another perspective, which is perversely invisible and no less cruel.

### *Slave labour in São Paulo*

As noted previously, national data on slave labour in Brazil indicates that 95 per cent of those identified in slave labour are men and 5 per cent are women. The Repórter Brasil investigation confirms that this proportion is recurrent in most Brazilian states. However, there are four exceptions: Amapá, Espírito Santo, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo\*.

The most outlier case from the national average is that of the state of São Paulo, where the proportion is 82 per cent and 18 per cent for men and women, respectively. In the city of São Paulo, the proportion moves further away from the national average: of the 430 victims, 30 per cent are women and 70 per cent are men. This is due to the considerable female presence in sewing workshops, which are one of the main sites of exploitation of workers in the city of São Paulo. Among the total number of women subject to slave labour in the city, 93.1 per cent are immigrants mainly from Latin American countries, such as Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay. The state of São Paulo also appears as one of the five main places of origin of the rescued workers. This is because foreign migrants are considered to have originated from the city where they were exploited.

In the case of Amapá, the number of people rescued is very low (six people) and, therefore, the presence of only one woman among them easily changes the proportion in question. In Espírito Santo, other investigations should be carried out for more consistent explanations about the states’s data. Finally, in Rio de Janeiro, where the proportion is similar to that of São Paulo, it appears that the presence of women is due to the rescues that took place in the sugar cane sector, where many women were identified among the exploited workers, but the cases require even more careful investigation and analysis.

The disaggregation of national data to the state and municipal levels allows for a new interpretation of slave labour in Brazil, as it is possible to identify the particularities of local



realities and understand how socioeconomic dynamics, which include gender issues, influence the configuration of this violation in different contexts throughout the country. In this sense, the systematization and dissemination of more accurate and precise data can contribute to making public policies, including those aiming to eradicate slave labour, more efficient at breaking the cycle of vulnerability and contributing to a more equitable and just society.

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### **Symposium: Land and Sea: Gendered Nature of Labour and Sexual Exploitation in Fisheries**

Juno Fitzpatrick, Director of Human Rights and Oceans, Conservation International

Elena Finkbeiner, Coastal Community Fisheries Program Manager, Conservation International

19 March 2021

Environmental sustainability has been the central focus of fisheries management and seafood market standards for decades. In marine wild capture fisheries, forced labour, human trafficking for labour exploitation and deplorable labour conditions are increasingly being recognized as **intertwined with environmental** issues, namely habitat destruction, overfishing and [illegal fishing](#). This interplay of conditions threatens the viability of livelihoods and food security, and creates conditions for discrimination and subversion of human rights. In recent years, [media revelations](#) and [scientific research](#) have brought increased attention to human rights violations, in both developing and developed economies, pointing to the [global scale of human rights violations](#) in seafood supply chains.

This International Women's Day, groups such as Conservation International called for the [greater protection](#) of women's rights and economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights in seafood value chains. Globally, the seafood sector is [women-intensive but male-dominated](#). Women play a vital, yet often overlooked, role in seafood production and seafood processing, including non-vessel based activities like gleaning, adding value to harvested products and marketing. According to some estimates, women make up [47 per cent of the global fishing workforce](#) and between [80-90 per cent of the post-harvest sector roles](#).

#### *Sexual exploitation and seafood landing hubs*

Despite the prominent role of women in the industry, much of the media, research and subsequent seafood sector response to human rights violations in fisheries is focused on safeguarding men against [modern slavery at sea](#). Globally, it is reported that more [men \(69 per cent\) than women \(40 per cent\)](#) are victims of labour exploitation in the private economy. Mirroring this trend, the vast majority of reported victims of [deceptive and coercive labour](#)



[practices](#) in sea-based fisheries is male. Whilst there is a lack of evidence illustrating that women are subject to forced labour or human trafficking on board fishing vessels, women and girls are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation in the fisheries sector on land. Across the Pacific Ocean, the [U.S. Department of State](#) has documented sex trafficking of women and children in service of crew members of foreign tuna fishing fleets and transshipment vessels that [dock in port](#). It is further reported that an [influx of foreign investment](#) in Pacific Island Countries has led to increased risk of forced labour and forced sexual exploitation of migrant workers in the fishing sectors.

At ports or landing sites, women also encounter pervasive gender-based violence (GBV). For example, in Nyamware Beach, Lake Victoria, [women work](#) in the post-harvest sector, where they unload, process and market fish. However, women are often required to have sex with fishermen as a transactional means [to secure priority access to the commodity when landed](#). This practice has led to high rates of [sexually transmitted infections](#), such as HIV/AIDS, and intensified gender-based violence within [communities adjacent to the lake](#).

#### *Trafficking in persons in the fishing industry: Fish processing*

Women are also victims of human trafficking and deplorable labour conditions in the [land-based fish processing](#) sectors. In 2006, the Thai police and immigration authorities raid of the Ranya Paew shrimp processing factory in Samut Sakhon drew attention to the 800 men, women and children from Myanmar imprisoned behind a razor wire-topped compound, [living in squalid conditions](#) and subject to physical, emotional and sexual abuse and harassment. Lesser known yet extensive inequalities persist within the essential roles that women hold in post-harvest [commercial-based factories](#). Journalist investigations have uncovered horrific examples of [factory workers spending 16 hours](#) a day with their hands in ice water peeling shrimp, and women experiencing low pay, extreme hours, unsafe and unsanitary working conditions, verbal abuse and occupational health hazards.

Furthermore, women in the global seafood industry are being disproportionately impacted by the economic and social fallout as a result of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#). The COVID crisis rapidly destabilized fisheries and aquaculture industries, disrupting supply chains and rendering marginalized groups, such as women and migrant fish workers, [vulnerable to shifting sector demands](#). Within the post-harvest sector, women are at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to their close proximity to one another in processing and marketing areas and, as [Oxfam reports](#), can be excluded from social protection and basic benefits due to their temporary or informal status as [unregistered workers](#).

#### *Gender-aware institutional responses*

The recent exposure of labour violations throughout seafood supply chains has created impetus for industry, governments and nonprofit organizations to develop solutions to address these issues. Akin to measures taken to achieve environmental sustainability, initiatives such as



strengthening ethical sourcing policies, adopting third-party social certifications and introducing traceability systems to increase supply chain oversight are steps in the right direction. Further action is needed to map and address the gendered nature of human rights violations in discrete segments of seafood supply chains in order to target specific high-risk contexts for women: landing sites, post-harvest and processing. The [2017 Monterey Framework for Socially Responsible Seafood](#) calls on government and industry alike to protect human rights, dignity and access to resources; to ensure equality and equitable opportunity to benefit; and to improve the food and livelihood security for crew, communities and workers. By mainstreaming women's essential role in the sector, supply chain actors can activate new partners and policy levers to institute cascading gender-aware policies, practices and social protections to uplift the women that constitute 47 per cent of the sector.

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### **Symposium: Gendered Measurements of Exploitation and its Impact on Survivors**

Caroline Adhiambo, Survivor Leader and Researcher

22 March 2021

Gender is not just a distinction between physical characteristics, as it reflects economics, politics and culture, and in all these areas, where communities stick to traditional cultural values and gender hierarchy, women are often unfavoured. This [gender bias](#) often prevents them from being accorded equal opportunities as their male counterparts who are viewed as more important as they are expected to continue the family lineage while women leave their families for marriage. This leaves most women from such communities at a disadvantage, as they may be forced into early marriages, denied educational opportunities and provided with limited or no economic or social protection.

Deep-rooted traditional practices and cultural values thereby foster a patriarchal societal system and make women more vulnerable to exploitation. Similarly, these structures may make it difficult for them to seek justice or remediation for abuse, thus contributing to under-reporting or not reporting such cases. For instance, in a case where a girl has been raped, such communities may view the victim as being immoral, thereby blaming her rather than the perpetrator. Her immediate family may choose to hide her abuse to avoid shame and ridicule. In an attempt to protect the family name, the victims may end up being subjected to early marriage in such cases, or sent away from their families to do unskilled labour for minimal pay while being overworked.

Women are not only taught but also expected to be subservient outside their home. This makes it hard for them to report workplace exploitation for fear of negative consequences like being



alienated, fired and being blamed as the victim. From undervaluation and sexual harassment of women in exchange for benefits like promotion, to gender inclusivity being an afterthought when work policies and programmes are being designed, women have for the longest time been sidelined in workplaces. Exclusion of women from certain jobs—such as, being denied access to positions of authority—not only limits women to a certain level but makes women subordinate to men even when they have more skills than the latter. This is reflected in the disproportionately low number of women in leadership positions. Being denied the opportunity to get certain skills and training limits some women to low-income jobs.

Gender bias is also seen in the exposure of children to sexual exploitation, including recruitment for pornography. Girls are sexually assaulted and forced into sex slavery and boys may also be sexually exploited by people who present themselves as their benefactors. Such cases are also almost never reported by families who fear a falling out with the perpetrator and losing whatever aid they were receiving. Emotional coercion adds to this vulnerability and couples with lack of awareness that such cases are incidents of trafficking or exploitation, hence leaving them at their mercy of the perpetrator.

While there are clear social and cultural factors that render women and girls more vulnerable to early marriage and labour exploitation, men and boys cannot be ignored in considering prevention and remedy to modern slavery. With the vast majority of human trafficking victims being women and girls, most of the assistance and protection policies that have been put in place focus on them while minimal and, in some instances, no attention is given to men and boys. This may be because of social structure and the common belief that men cannot actually be exploited. Men have most of the time been viewed as aggressors and not victims, so those men who have been exploited and who try to report or speak about their exploitation are met with disbelief, often seen as weak and may be subjected to shame and ridicule. To protect themselves from this gender-based stigmatization, many men may choose not to speak out about their experiences.

In most African cultures, for example, men are expected to be providers and protectors, and they are trained in these expectations from an early age. Most of them end up being subjected to long hours, meagre pay, poor housing and—in some instances—sexual exploitation. Though this is a form of modern slavery, most of them don't complain. For instance, if a man complains of minimal pay despite long working hours and physical abuse, they might be told to stop whining and “man up”. With a compromised sense of manhood, male victims may blame themselves for not doing enough to protect themselves from being exploited. This may lead to them not speaking up about their experiences. Instead, they endure a life of misery and a cycle of poverty that traps them, their spouses and their children with little chance for escape.

The inability of such victims, both male and female, to speak out in a bid to protect themselves from social judgement may also make it difficult to quantify the exact number of victims of trafficking and modern-day slavery, much less remediate such cases. Lack of knowledge and wayward cultural practices also act as a hindrance, as victims from such communities may





choose not to speak up due to the defined gender roles and community expectations of them. Both men and women are potential or actual victims of exploitation, and it is therefore important to consider how gender roles affect vulnerability to abuse, and create truly inclusive policy and practices.

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