



Migrant women's strategies to cope with employment practices in Thai seafood sector

A case study from Rayong and Trat provinces

Veena N and Kyoko Kusakabe

- Research problem, objective and methodology
- Where are young migrant women in the fisheries sector in Thailand, and what do they do?
- Gender stereotypes in Cambodia and its impact on young women
- Gender norms in Thai fishing industry and its impact on women and men
- Conclusions

Outline

- Many young Cambodians are joining the fisheries sector in Thailand either as labor migrants or accompanying their parents.
- Does this affect their education and their future life choices?
- Is there any gender difference?



Research Problem

- This research analyzed how gender roles, norms, and stereotypes shape the opportunities that Cambodian young women have, both when they migrate to work in the Thai seafood industry, as well as when they stay in their own village in Cambodia.
- It focused particularly on their access to education, training, and social protection services.
- The aim was to develop appropriate program and policy recommendations for gender transformative interventions both in Thailand and in Cambodia which would result in ensuring young Cambodian women's rights as workers, migrants, and as mothers/ daughters.

Research Objectives

- Desk review
- Selection of study area
- Key informant interviews
- Informal discussions
- Field study
- In depth interview was chosen as the main methodology for primary data collection because it allowed an exploration of both individual experiences and gender ideologies with respect to migrant women's lives.

Methodology



Mending nets at the pier, Rayong

Young migrant women contribute to the Thai seafood sector supply chain in the following jobs:

- **Seafood processing:** Women work in factories picking crab meat, cutting tuna and other fish, peeling octopus meat, and shrimps
- **Fish sorting:** Women sort fish by type, size and quality for export or sale in Thailand.
- **Mending nets:** Migrants and local women and men all mend nets, with higher skilled work getting paid more.
- **Home-based work/freelance work:** Many migrant women, especially women with small children and long-term migrants who had developed networks could work from home. The jobs were seafood processing and net repairs.

Women's place

“Girl cannot learn as high as boys, because boys are stronger than girls.” – KI, Prey Veng province, Cambodia

“You should get married, because after marriage you can depend on your husband.” – Informal discussion, Prey Veng province, Cambodia

“Only mother can take care of the children.” – KI, Prey Veng province, Cambodia

“Parents come and take students away [from vocational training] to work in the factory because of family condition.” – KI, Prey Veng province, Cambodia

Gender stereotypes in Cambodia

- I love my daughter and I am worried about her safety. So I can't send her far away to study. A woman should be around the kitchen. – KI, female, Prey Veng province.
- Only mother can take good care of children. So we do not have crèche. – KI, village head, Prey Veng province.
- Girls can't travel far from home because they could be raped, and they will get a bad reputation," according to a KI in Prey Veng.

More gender stereotypes



Men are stronger, women are detail oriented

→ Therefore, men catch seafood, women process seafood

Men are main income earners

→ Therefore, men earn a minimum of Bt 10,000, women earn a minimum of Bt 5,000

Women are main care givers

→ Therefore, men are paid at the end of contract, women are paid daily, weekly or thrice a month

Gender stereotypes in Thai fisheries sector

- Forced migration of women to Thailand
- Forced to work in Thailand
- Women live alone in Thailand: safety issues
- Strategy: Ghetto and safety in numbers
- Women bear double burden: income and household work

Implications of gender norms

- “I completed Grade 6 in Cambodia, but after coming to Thailand, I started again at Grade 2. I was older than other children, so I felt shy and dropped out.” – respondent #15, 20 yo, restaurant staff, Rayong
- “We cannot go for any training because we have to be available anytime the fish come, even at 3 am in the morning.” – respondent #7, 19 yo, fish sorter, Rayong.
- “Even if we get a better paying job, we cannot go because our work permit is for this job only.” – respondent #5, 20 yo, fish sorter, Trat.

Education In Thailand



Rayong, Thailand

- Fisheries industry has a seasonal and annual fluctuation in catch and hence in fisheries and seafood sector income.
- This fluctuation is transferred to migrant women workers by business owners, by having employment on piece-rate basis rather than on a monthly salary.
- Since all of women's income is spent in daily expenses, the family savings is completely dependent on men's income. Hence, men have greater control over how that larger annual lumpsum income is spent.
- Women shoulder the double burden of household and income every day; there is little acknowledgement of this fact within the Khmer community.

Conclusions

- We would like to thank Plan International for their support for the project

Thank you

