

**Insights from the Margins:
Gender, Work and Occupational Health
in the Context of Neoliberal
Globalization**

**Presentation to the CUPE National Convention,
St. John's, October 25, 2008**

Neoliberal Globalization

- An era of increasing integration of the world economy starting in the mid-1970s
- Based on neo-liberal principles
- Designed to “free” economic activity through:
 - ✓ increased foreign direct investment;
 - ✓ trade liberalization;
 - ✓ privatization of public agencies and resources;
 - ✓ deregulation of production, labour markets, markets in goods and services;
 - ✓ implementation of regional and international trade agreements (Beneria and Lind 1995).
- Has contributed to corporate concentration and the relative power of corporations.

Neoliberal Globalization

Armstrong and Armstrong, 2002

- “Globalization is about the technological, political and other processes that are increasing the capacity of corporations to move investments and work quickly around the world, avoiding taxes and regulations.”
- Globalization processes mediate:
 1. environmental change
 2. employment options and distribution
 3. wealth generation and distribution (in the short and longer term)
 4. health (including occupational health)
 5. food security, human rights and security
 6. cultural processes and practices .

Globalization and Gender

Each of the above is gendered in its patterns and consequences.

Broadhead , 2002

- It is “time to re-state (even yell from the rooftops) the importance of a gendered approach to globalization.”
- It is important to challenge claims that globalization is producing higher standards for environmental protection, improved incomes or better protection of human rights (*and human health*).

McMahon 2002

- We need to challenge claims that globalization will “feed the world,” giving it a moral as well as a market imperative.

Globalization, Gender and OHS

- Neoliberal globalization has been associated with an increase in all forms of precarious work (Quinlan, Mayhew & Bohle, 2001).
 - Men's jobs are becoming more like women's jobs.
- Precarious workers are:
 - at greater risk of poverty;
 - have more limited knowledge of OHS;
 - are at greater risk of work-related injury and illness than permanent workers (Aronsson 1999; Lippel 2006).
- Precarious work is generally associated with:
 - substandard employee training and knowledge of OHS standards (Aronsson, 1999; Eakin, 1992)
 - challenges regulating OHS policies and procedures (e.g., Mayhew, 1997a; Mayhew & Quinlan, 1997; Quinlan, Mayhew & Bohle, 2001).
- Precarious workers are less likely to file compensation claims (Lippel, 2006) – contributing to invisibility.

Lessons from the margins

By the mid-1990s fisheries were among the most highly globalized economic sectors (LeSann 1998).

- nearly 40% of global fish production was traded on international markets
- they have become more globalized since that time.

Fisheries are:

- very vulnerable to the effects of overharvesting and climate change
- export-oriented
- subject to frequent, severe change/restructuring (boom- bust industries)
- remote and difficult to regulate
- associated with precarious employment

Research on fisheries can help us see the relationships between neoliberal globalization, gender, work and occupational health.

Fishing Down the Food Chain

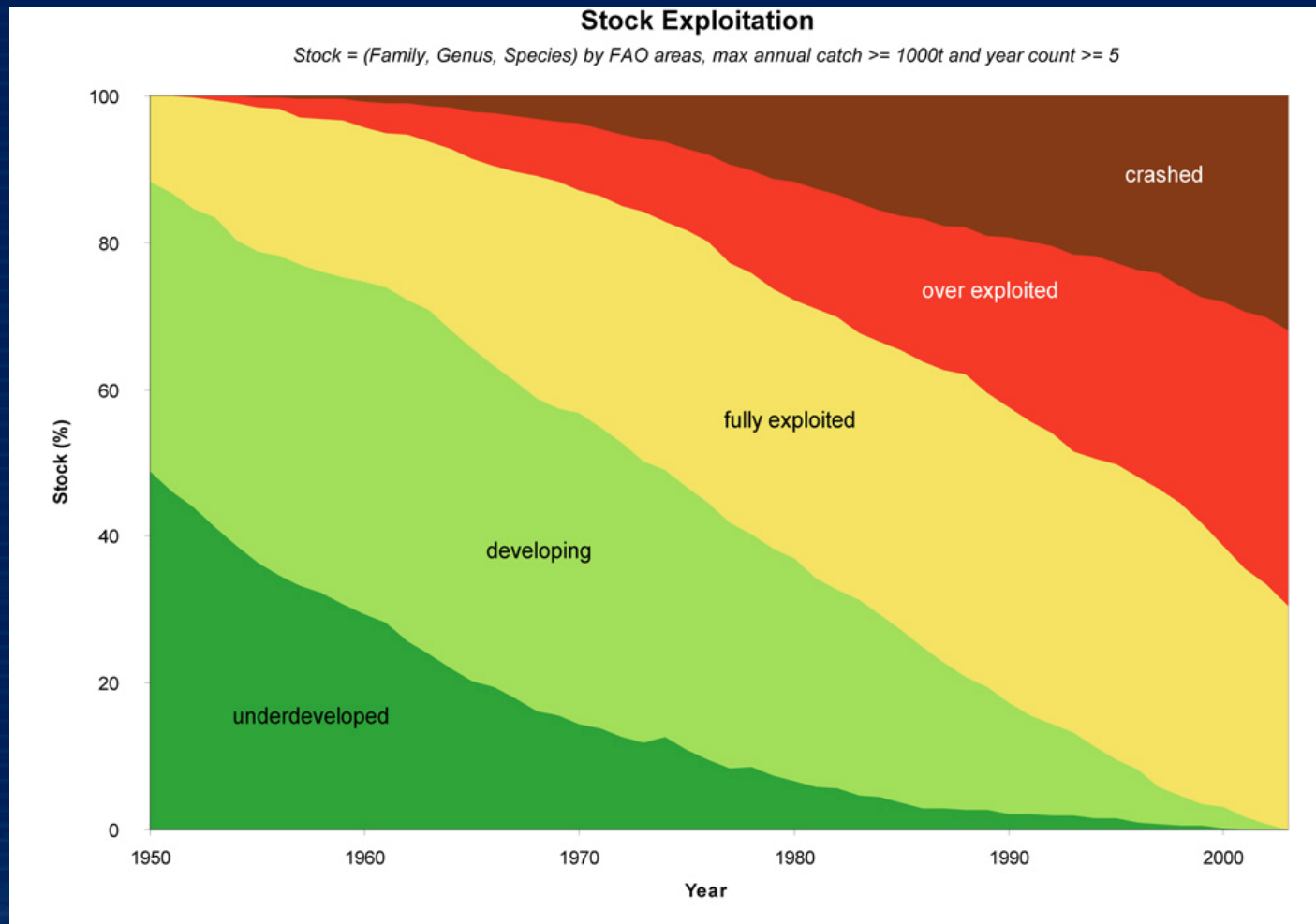


Figure 1. Global trend in the status of marine fisheries resources. Based on FAO statistics to 2003 and the methods and definitions in Froese and Pauly (2003) extracted from Khan et al. 2006

Lessons from the Margins

The neoliberal solution to overharvesting is privatization of fish stocks but it pays to fish out stocks

With privatization, control over quotas becomes concentrated, wealth accumulates in the hands of quota owners versus harvesters and their crews (Pinkerton 2008)

Economic vulnerability can lead to cheating and to taking chances, threatening the health of the resource and of the fish harvesters

Export orientation and privatization often threaten food security - nine of the top 40 fish-exporting countries are considered to have a low-income food deficit (Pauly et al. 2004)

Lessons from the Margins

SafetyNet

- Large-scale fisheries are major contributors to greenhouse gases (Pauley and Maclean 2003) and vulnerable to changes in fuel costs.
- Marine and freshwater ecosystems are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In addition,
 - Climate change is not gender neutral
 - Women and men are affected differently by natural disasters
 - Women are under-represented in decision-making about climate change and about adaptation and mitigation
 - Given gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development and poverty reduction, inequalities magnified by climate change will slow progress towards these goals (IUCN 2008).

- OHS in fisheries and its link to precarity are still under-researched, particularly in the processing, trade and aquaculture sectors.

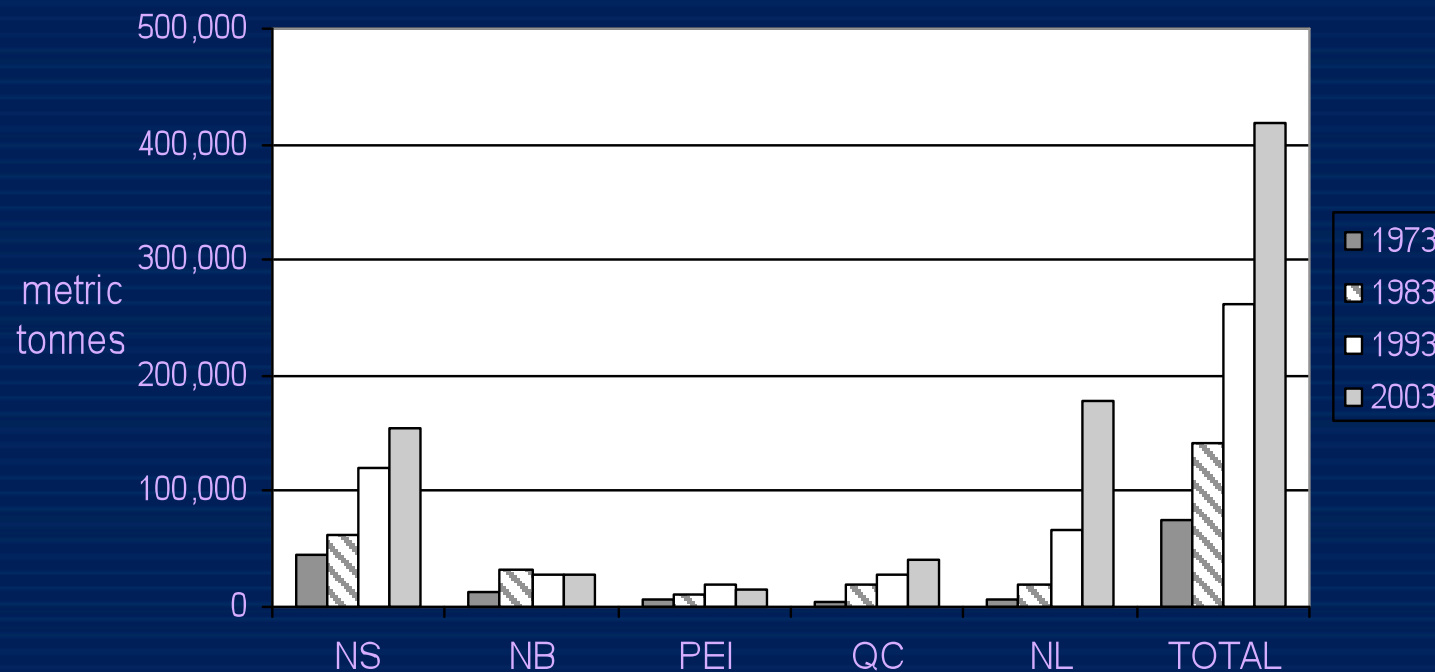
But - rapid industrial restructuring puts the health of workers at risk -

- Díaz (2005) found that the Chilean salmon aquaculture industry took better care of the fish than of the health of its primarily female workers.
- Similar problems have been identified in Bangladesh's brackish-water shrimp export sector (Ahsan et al. in Williams et al. 2006).

Migrant workers

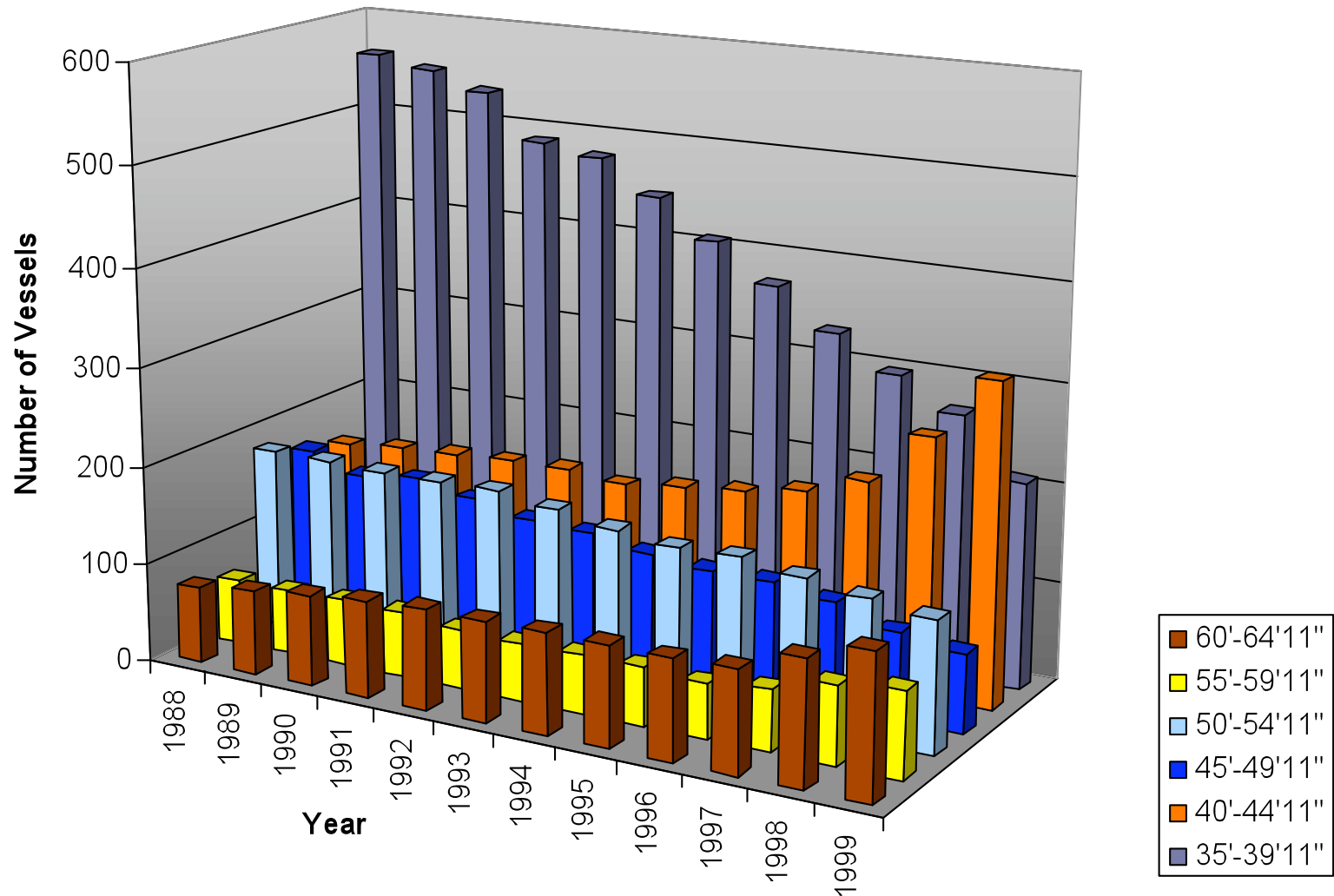
- *Goods and people* are moving more and moving further.
- Work-related mobility can open up new opportunities but create unique risks and challenges
 - In 2002, fewer than five countries had signed the International Convention for the Protection of Migrant Workers and their Families (Velasco 2002:133).
 - Fisherfolk are at risk of HIV/AIDs (Allison and Seeley 2004)
- Migrant workers are separated from their homes and families; often have limited citizenship rights.

From Groundfish to Shellfish



Shellfish landings for Eastern Canada (1973-2003)

Fleet Profile 1988-99



Wareham 2008

- Shift from wooden to fibreglass reinforced boats in past 15 years - linked to new crab and shrimp fisheries
- Rapid expansion to 48 fibreglass boat building and repair businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador around 2000
- Subsequent rapid decline
- At peak, approximately 750 workers
- Working in small, remote, nonunionized operations

Wareham 2008

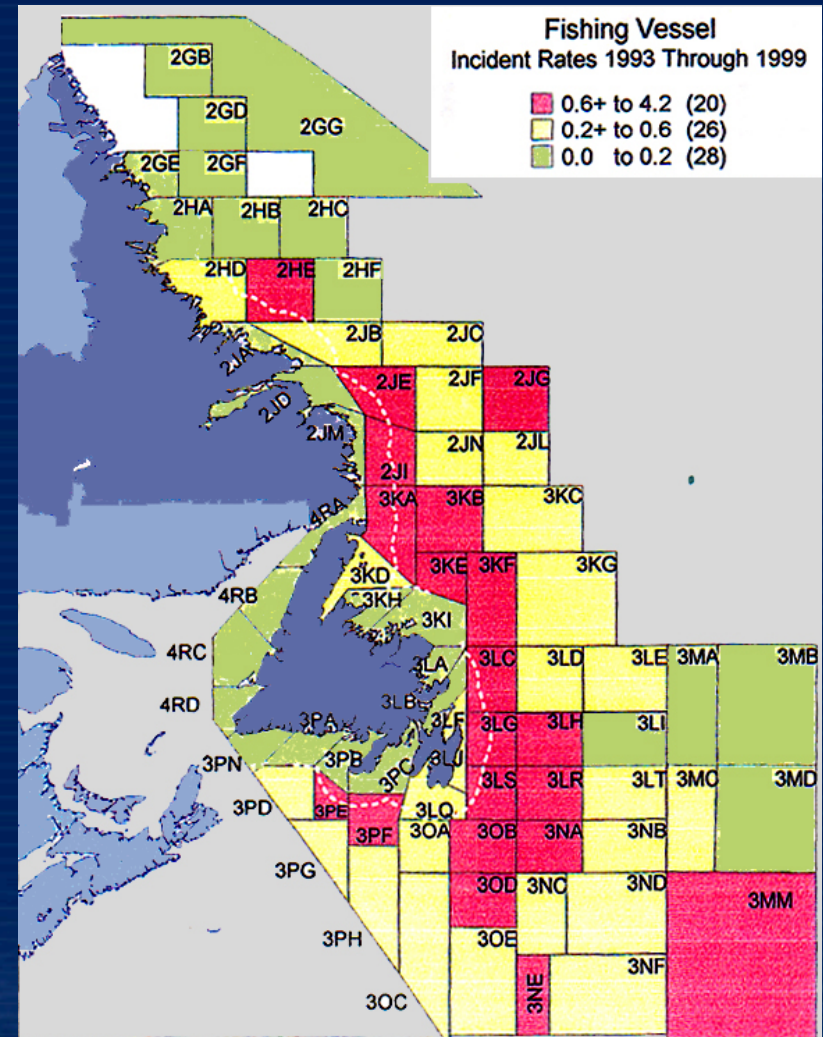
- Fibreglass boat building and repair requires the release of the chemical styrene, a known neurotoxin associated with
 - Mood instability (Campagna et al., 1995) and aggression that may negatively impact social relationships (Julien, et al., 2000)
 - Irritation and forgetfulness (Flodin, Ekberg, Anderson, 1989)
 - Fatigue and depression (ATSDR, 1992)
 - Reduced color vision (Castillo, Baldwin, Sassine, & Mergler, 2001)
 - Hearing loss (Sliwinska-Kowalska, et al., 2003)

- All employees working with chemicals in Canadian workplaces should have knowledge of the hazardous chemicals in their workplace - Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems (WHMIS)
- In Wareham (2008):
 - 61% (26) employees had completed WHMIS training, 33% (14) had not
 - 44% (18) indicated they did not receive safety training before they started their job
 - 37% (16) indicated they had not received any safety training since starting their job
 - 54% (23) indicated that they had not been informed about the health effects of styrene exposure.

Pelot (2000)

- SAR incidents and fishing activity 1993-1999
- Inshore fishing areas had low and steady incident rates
- Offshore activity increased with fishery restructuring from cod to crab
- These areas had higher incident rates

Newfoundland Fishing Incidents: Perspectives and Analysis.
R. Pelot, 2000



- **NEW FISHERIES, NEW RISKS**
 - Fishing farther from shore, in small, aging, inappropriate boats
 - Buddying up to mitigate risk
 - Unfamiliar with crab fishery
 - Navigating through shipping lanes without radar



- **CHANGING VESSELS, CHANGING RISKS**
 - Modification of vessels to 'better suit' new fisheries
 - Space constraints and safety

(Brennan, Neis and Power 2006)

Shellfish processing

SafetyNet

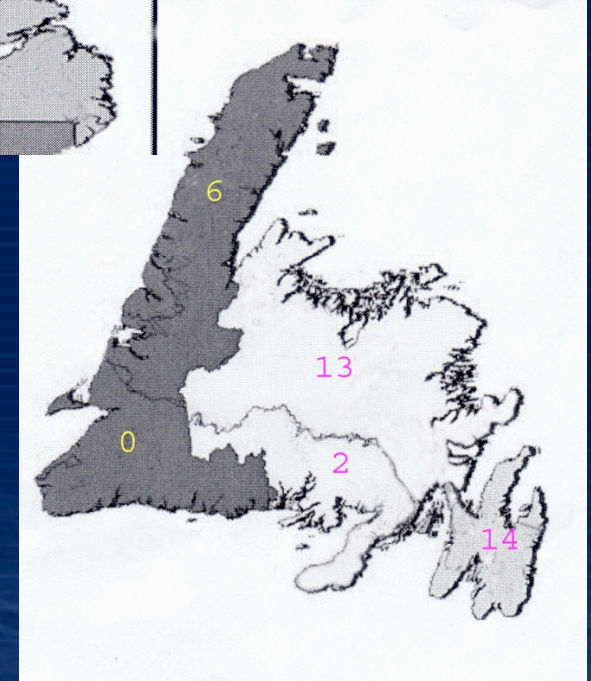
Is associated with chemicals and allergens that can trigger respiratory problems like asthma, bronchitis, etc.

These include:

- Aerosolized proteins
- Cleaning chemicals
- Ammonia
- Sulphites (to brighten raw product)
- Forklift fumes

- Estimated 22,000 workers across Eastern Canada
- Primarily female workers, gender division of labour

Licensed Crab Processing Plants, 2003



Shellfish Processing

SafetyNet

Crab processing is associated with high percentage of work-related asthma in the 4 NL plants

- Approximately 18% participants - almost certain or highly probable diagnosis of OAA
 - ✓ Highest percentage (close to 50%) in the oldest plant where there was also poor ventilation
 - ✓ Cooked Crab cleaning & Sawing in low ventilation areas were highest risk jobs

(Gautrin et al. submitted)

Exposures and illness

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Workers with higher cumulative exposure were more likely to have crab asthma

Women had higher cumulative exposures on average than men
working in higher exposure jobs
on average had worked longer in the industry

Women were more likely to be sick

(Howse et al. 2006)

Other issues...

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- Negative effects on quality of life for the sick
- Issues with quality of medical care, HCP knowledge about OAA, access to specialists, cost of drugs
- Workers (primarily women) tended to work until could no longer work because:
 - few alternatives for employment
 - family responsibilities
 - “like having a job”
 - “economic independence”Those who did were putting themselves at risk of longer-term breathing problems
(Howse, 2005)

- Environmental degradation triggered industrial restructuring that interacted with the built environment (boats, plants), neoliberal policy change, wider industrial change and with gender and class relations to influence the risk of illness, injury and fatality & options and opportunities for dealing with it (MacDonald et al. forthcoming)
- The global and local fishing industries continue to be highly dynamic - shifting species (sea cucumber), to aquaculture and may shift from local to migrant workers (Moreau and Neis forthcoming; Grzetic, in prep)
- Processing work is also shifting rapidly around the world; knowledge of the risks and solutions is not necessarily following.

Lessons from the margins

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- Research on globalization, gender, work precarity and OHS reminds us that our exposure assessments need to extend beyond measuring allergens, chemicals, and ergonomic stressors to social power exposure assessments.
- Social power includes 'power over' and 'power to'
- It influences not only outcomes but also whether a problem gets on the agenda or is even understood to be a problem.
- Neoliberal globalization is deepening disparities in power, speeding up the space of change and narrowing opportunities for detection, prevention of risk.



Questions or comments?