

WORKPLACE HEALTH PROMOTION IN THE COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY

– A CASE STUDY OF PORT LINCOLN

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Abstract

Background

Commercial fishing is one of the most hazardous industries as evidenced by international injury data comparisons. Its workforce includes seasonal, self-employed and vulnerable people, often lacking supportive structures. Along with workplace injuries, mental health problems and chronic health conditions have been identified in the literature. Even though there have been calls for health promotion interventions, there is no strategic approach or conceptual framework addressing workers' health and well-being within commercial fishing industries.

This research aimed to understand and describe the commercial fishing industry of Port Lincoln from multiple perspectives and to propose a framework for workplace health promotion interventions applicable to rural fishing industries. The central research question guiding this study was 'How could a pragmatic framework for effective workplace health promotion be structured for use within commercial fishing industries?' This question was addressed by surveying workers and exploring the perspectives of a variety of industry managers and stakeholders in the South Australian town of Port Lincoln, incorporating the sectors of wild-catch, aquaculture and seafood processing.

Methods

This study used a case study methodology that incorporated a mixed methods strategy of data collection and analysis. An integrative literature review of international literature was undertaken; a qualitative study investigated the views of industry managers, stakeholders and health providers; and a survey questionnaire explored the needs and perceptions of the industry's workforce. This mix of different methods highlighted various viewpoints and strengthened the findings by enabling triangulation of data. A realistic and credible range of key factors for an effective workplace health promotion program was thereby identified and a framework created from these findings.

Results

An integrative literature review of international literature on fishing industries pointed to high workloads, employment instability, as well as other pressures arising from uncertainties and unstable working conditions impacting on the health and well-being of the fishing industry's workers. Even though these workers are a difficult population to approach with interventions, a need for health support and a call for preventive and health promoting strategies was found throughout the international literature. The systematic search strategy revealed that, to date, no health promotion approach has been developed and implemented within a fishing industry workforce.

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with twenty-seven industry managers, stakeholders and health providers gave in-depth insight into the phenomena under investigation. An unstructured approach of supporting workers' health and well-being was identified and industry managers stated an interest in learning more about the possibilities of workplace health promotion. The culture of the industry was described as very competitive, with many psychosocial pressures resting on the workers, relating to low socio-economic background, isolation, the difficulty of maintaining stable relationships while out at sea and economic pressures. High rates of drug and alcohol use as well as mental health issues were described as problematic, with the interviews revealing the struggle of industry managers to deal with these issues. Due to workers migrating to other rural industries the participants also considered health and well-being interventions to be a valuable asset in contributing towards staff retention.

To further explore the workforce needs and from there develop a framework, a survey was undertaken among workers in the various industry subsectors, occupational groups and enterprises. For this purpose, a new data collection tool to survey the fishing industry's workforce regarding their health and well-being at the workplace was created. The survey included 179 participants and revealed a large potential for utilising workplace health promotion programs. Even though the term 'workplace health promotion' was not recognised by workers, they were interested in offers of health promotion and pointed to an array of services they would like to see their workplace provide. Moreover, there were evident benefits to be gained by employers. The survey underlined the large potential of workplace health promotion in keeping staff connected and committed to the industry.

Discussion and Implications

Based on the evidence of the data, a framework of workplace health promotion for the commercial fishing industry was developed. The DOME Framework of Health Promotion aims at creating a healthy workplace for workers and employers and revolves around the respectful interaction of both. The framework addresses four domains (*DO*) that incorporate an active approach to educating and empowering workers, social and emotional support, modification of organisational arrangements to enable workers to adopt healthy behaviour and engagement with the surrounding community. These domains are guided by principal mechanisms that steer the utilisation and implementation of the framework. These mechanisms (*ME*) are defined as mutual trust, leadership, communication and participation.

It is recommended that this multifaceted approach be presented to regional development boards to support the building of workplace health promotion strategies from within the industry and in collaboration with the community. A culture of valuing and promoting a healthy, qualified and motivated workforce is the primary objective, thereby leading to the improved retention of workers and enhanced productivity. It is suggested that theoretical propositions arising from this research, relating to the application of health promotion principles, can be generalised and the framework transferred to other commercial fishing industries.

Declaration

I, Andrea Rona Barclay, certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and, where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ASGC	Australian Standard Geographic Classification
AFMA	Australian Fisheries Management Authority
ASBTIA	Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association
CWHP	Comprehensive Workplace Health Promotion
DigA	Diagnose gesundheitsförderlicher Arbeit (Diagnosis of Health-Promoting Work)
DOME	Domains / Mechanisms
EBSCO	Elton Bryson Stephens Company
EMBASE	Excerpta Medica Database
ENWHP	European Network of Workplace Health Promotion
FISHP	Fishing Industry Survey of Health Promotion
FRDC	Fisheries Research & Development Corporation
GP	General Practitioner
HNA	Health Needs Assessment
HP	Health Provider
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
HW-HF	Healthy Workers - Healthy Futures
IM	Industry Manager
LGA	Local Government Area
NSW	New South Wales
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
PICo	Population, Phenomenon of Interest, Context
PIRSA	Primary Industries and Regions South Australia
PubMed	Public Medline
RIRDC	Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation Science
SA	South Australia
SAWIC	South Australian WorkCover Industrial Classification
SBT	Southern Bluefin Tuna
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
SH	Stakeholder
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
THCU	The Health Communication Unit
TOOCS	Type of Occurrence Classification System
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organisation
WHP	Workplace Health Promotion
WHS	Workplace Health and Safety
WRC	Workers' Rehabilitation and Compensation
WRIS	Work-Related Injuries Survey

Glossary

Commercial Fishing Industry	Overarching term comprising industry sectors of wild-catch and aquaculture, as well as industry businesses of seafood processing and wholesale. Any workplaces directly related to fishing, aquaculture and seafood industries are included and subsumed under the term of 'commercial fishing industry' for the purpose of this study. Supporting industrial sectors such as transport businesses are excluded. Moreover, recreational and indigenous fishing activities are excluded and not part of this research.
Framework	A supporting structure or a skeleton of interlinked items which may guide the creation and implementation of complex events or interventions, in this case of workplace health promotion. It serves as a guide that can be activated and modified as required.
Stakeholder	Individuals who have an interest in the health and safety of fishing industry workers, including regulatory bodies; who represent the industry workers or enterprises on a higher level; or who have an interest in the development and sustainability of the industry; as well as experts on the industry.
Worker	A person undertaking work within the commercial fishing industry, including hired and seasonally contracted staff, as well as family members and people working for owner-operated businesses.
Workplace Health Promotion	According to the Luxembourg Declaration (European Network for Workplace Health Promotion 2007) the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work. This can be achieved by a combination of improving the work organisation and the working environment, promoting active participation and by encouraging personal development.

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¹ To the date of submission several journal articles were additionally prepared for publication.