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MODERN SLAVERY PROMOTES OVERFISHING

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On many fishing boats, men and boys work under threats of violence. Credit: ILO.

Abuse at work, including modern slavery, are "hidden subsidies" that allow distant fishing fleets to remain profitable and promote overfishing, new research from the University of Western Australia and the initiative *Sea Around Us* at the University of British Columbia has found.

Combining data on fishing from the initiative *Sea Around Us* to UBC with nationwide data on modern slavery, researchers found that countries whose fleets rely heavily on government subsidies, they fish far from domestic ports, and fail to report their effective catch completely, tend to fish beyond sustainable limits and are at higher risk of abuse at work.

"The crews of ships from China, Taiwan, Thailand, South Korea and Russia are particularly at risk due to a lack of regulatory oversight in those countries, combined with the complexity of the jurisdiction at sea, which makes it easier forcing people to work excessively long hours, often in terrible conditions, to extract as many fish as possible in exchange for a low or pay," said David Tickler, lead author of the study of the University of Western Australia.

With the global capture of marine fish at a rate of 1.2 million tons annually since the mid-1990s, the only way in which many fleets of industrial countries have been able to remain "profitable" is to receive government subsidies. However, labor costs can generally be reduced only by reducing workers' pay and conditions.

"The lack of control over these boats makes them fertile ground for labor abuses and other crimes, including illegal fishing, also facilitating transshipment, where catches of several fishing vessels are often combined prior to disembarkation. conditions of modern slavery is recycled by mixing it with legally fished

fish before it enters the supply chain," said Daniel Pauly, co-author of the study and principal investigator of the initiative *Sea Around Us* and UBC's Institute for Oceans and Fisheries. Here's how the "low risk of slavery" markets, such as the United States, the EU and Australia, end up consuming seafood that could be captured by modern slaves.

"While at national level the risk of average slavery in the United States is low, the United States accounts for about 14% of global fish imports and such imports have a risk of slavery 17 times higher than that fished by US fleets in the United States. Here, said co-author Dirk Zeller, leader of the *Sea Around Us* – Initiative of the Indian Ocean at the UWA.

Once imported seafood into local markets with fish captured by the US fleet, "seafood available for domestic use in the United States consumers are eight times more likely to have been produced or processed by modern slavery. It makes the choice on sustainability and social justice very difficult," said Jessica Meeuwig, director of the Marine Futures Lab of the UWA and co-author of the study.

In the wake of these results, researchers are calling for a strengthening of national laws so that both the environmental and social elements of sustainability in supply chains of fish products can be controlled in a transparent manner. "This would impose greater responsibility on the large seafood companies that often influence the behavior of suppliers and those who, perhaps without knowing it, are currently taking advantage of modern slavery," said Fiona David, director of research for the Walk Free Foundation, the architects of the Global Slavery Index.

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