

## The Ecology of Fishermen's Masculinity: Alienation at Sea and Sexual Expression on Land

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### Abstract

This qualitative study examines the Ecology of Fishermen's Masculinity in Jember, focusing on the relationship between the fishermen's unique working conditions and their engagement in high-risk sexual behavior. The fishing profession is characterized by high mobility and prolonged isolation at sea, producing biological and psychological pressures stemming from extended separation from family. These accumulated pressures manifest as Sexual Expression on Land, in which fishermen seek release through risky sexual practices, including the use of Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) during stopovers at transit ports. The study aims to explore the complexity underlying fishermen's high-risk sexual behavior. Using a case-study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 fishermen from the southern coastal region of Jember in order to uncover the cultural and psychological contexts shaping their actions. The findings indicate that pressures arising from isolation and alienation at sea drive fishermen to seek sexual compensation when on land. Approximately 30% of the interviewed fishermen reported involvement in high-risk sexual encounters with CSWs. Such behaviors are legitimized by the hegemonic masculinity norms embedded in coastal communities, where social status is often associated with sexual dominance, reinforcing permissive attitudes. This vulnerability is further exacerbated by structural factors such as economic instability and limited knowledge of sexual health and unsafe practices. The complex interplay between individual and structural factors contributes to the rising trend of HIV/AIDS cases in coastal communities, highlighting the urgent need for holistic, community-based interventions and structural improvements in access to health services. The study concludes that the complexity of fishermen's sexual behavior is shaped by an intricate interaction between individual factors (stress-coping mechanisms) and structural forces (culture, patriarchy, and economic conditions).

**Keywords:** Masculinity Ecology, Social Alienation, Sexual Expression, High-Risk Sexual Behavior, Fishermen

### Abstrack

Artikel ini membahas tentang branding religi di media sosial, menganalisis reaksi pengguna TikTok terhadap fenomena viral #muthawwifboywetrust di platform TikTok. Mengingat fenomena maya tersebut menimbulkan

keresahan masyarakat akibat dugaan perilaku tidak pantas yang dilakukan seorang muthawwif, sosok yang dikenal sebagai orang yang beragama. Beragam reaksi pengguna media sosial khususnya platform TikTok terhadap ketidaksesuaian antara citra keagamaan dan perilaku pribadi seorang khatib menjadi fokus kajian dalam artikel ini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis respon pengguna TikTok terhadap fenomena tersebut dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui pendekatan netnografi yaitu observasi dan analisis komentar di TikTok. Data dianalisis menggunakan kategorisasi jenis respons: negatif, positif, dan netral. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan mayoritas komentar bernada negatif, bernada kritik terhadap disonansi antara branding agama dan perilaku khalwat. Namun ada juga komentar positif yang menuntut objektivitas dan etika dalam memberikan kritik, serta komentar netral yang mengajak masyarakat bijak dalam menilai suatu kasus. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa di era digital, citra keagamaan yang dibangun melalui media sosial rentan mengalami krisis kepercayaan jika tidak diselaraskan dengan perilaku nyata. Integritas pribadi dan literasi digital sangat penting dalam menjaga kredibilitas profesi keagamaan di ranah publik.

**Kata Kunci:** muthawwif; religious; khalwat

## Introduction

Fishermen constitute a coastal community group that holds a vital role in the fisheries and maritime sectors. This profession is characterized by distinctive features such as high mobility and seasonal work patterns. In carrying out their activities, fishermen often spend several days to weeks at sea, far from their families and social environments. This condition keeps them away from their social networks and families for extended periods. The demanding and high-risk nature of their work creates specific social challenges, particularly those related to sexual behavior. Studies on the sexual behavior of fishermen in Indonesia, although crucial, remain limited to date. Their high mobility and prolonged isolation are key factors in understanding the dynamics of their behavioral patterns.

There is strong evidence that fishermen represent a group vulnerable to risky sexual behaviors (Fauzi, 2018, 45–60). Factors such as loneliness, high mobility, and limited access to healthcare services serve as major triggers for unsafe sexual practices among fishermen (Fauzi, 2018, 45–60). The fishing profession is often associated with instability in family life, which increases the likelihood of extramarital sexual behavior when fishermen stop at transit ports (Surbakti, 2020, 75–88). Such behaviors directly contribute to the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS in coastal regions. In several regions, the use of commercial sex workers (CSWs) among fishermen has been reported to be relatively high (Widodo et al., 2019, 89–102). Therefore, the phenomenon of risky sexual behavior among fishermen warrants serious attention and deeper

investigation.

A central issue in these behaviors is the strong culture of masculinity embedded in fishing communities. This culture often links social status and honor to the ability to exercise sexual dominance. In some coastal communities, permissive attitudes toward risky sexual behavior are even reinforced by these norms (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2018, 87–99). The ecological context of the profession, in which fishermen face isolation and danger at sea, further strengthens the perceived need to demonstrate “strength” on land. This phenomenon is termed the “ecology of masculinity,” referring to the interaction between harsh working conditions and dominant gender constructions. This study explores how the culture and social environment of fishermen specifically influence expressions of sexuality on land.

Isolation at sea becomes a major psychological trigger that drives the search for sexual release. Fishermen who spend long periods in the middle of the ocean, away from their partners and emotional support, often experience social isolation. Stress resulting from heavy work and prolonged solitude can lead to mental strain that influences their sexual decision-making. Fishermen engaged in long-distance journeys are more vulnerable to engaging in risky sexual behaviors, particularly when docking at transit ports (Wicaksono, 2022, 45–58). They often seek compensation or emotional release, one of which is by visiting CSWs. This behavior is understood as a mechanism to cope with accumulated tension and loneliness during their time at sea.

Conversely, sexual expression on land represents a manifestation of released pressure after prolonged isolation. Ports or coastal areas become social interaction points where commercial sexual practices tend to thrive (Yusuf, 2020, 89–102). Upon returning to land, fishermen take advantage of this opportunity to fulfill biological needs that remain unmet during their time at sea. Peer pressure and the availability of nightlife around port areas further trigger such risky behaviors (Widodo et al., 2019, 89–102). Practices such as prostitution or extramarital affairs frequently occur as forms of compensation for the lack of intimate relations within marriage (Surbakti, 2020, 75–88). Thus, the land becomes a space where masculinity is tested and sexual needs are openly expressed.

Economic aspects cannot be overlooked as another structural factor influencing fishermen's behavior. As a group dependent on unstable catch yields, fishermen often face uncertain economic conditions. Income instability can cause financial stress, which in turn affects irrational sexual decision-making (Surbakti, 2020, 75–88). Fishermen experiencing economic hardship are reported to be more vulnerable to engaging in risky sexual behaviors, including having unprotected intercourse or frequently changing partners (Suryani, 2021, 99–109). Research indicates that fishermen's sexual behavior is closely intertwined with their vulnerable socioeconomic context (Rahman & Sugiharto, 2019, 34–47).

In addition to cultural and economic factors, limited access to sexual health services exacerbates the situation. In many coastal regions, comprehensive healthcare facilities—particularly those related to sexual health—are difficult for fishermen to access. Surveys show that fishermen's knowledge of STIs and contraceptive use remains considerably low (Ministry of Health, 2019). This lack of education contributes to low awareness of safe sexual practices. Limited access and insufficient knowledge further increase the risk of STI transmission among fishing communities.

This research aims to address gaps in the literature by examining in depth the complex interactions among these factors and how they shape fishermen's sexual behavior patterns. Previous studies have largely focused on economic impacts while overlooking crucial aspects of social behavior. The research location, the southern coastal area of Jember Regency, offers a sociocultural context rich in relevance for this exploration. The fishing communities in this area display strong patriarchal structures and cultural permissiveness toward extramarital behavior. Understanding the dynamics of fishermen's sexual behavior in Jember is essential for designing relevant intervention programs (Pratama & Kusuma, 2024, 45–60).

Based on this background, the study formulates several core questions. First, what factors influence fishermen's sexual behavior? Second, how do high mobility and masculine culture specifically affect fishermen's sexual behavior on land? Third, to what extent do socioeconomic conditions and access to healthcare services shape their sexual behavior? These questions guide efforts to achieve a comprehensive understanding of this issue. Answers to these questions are expected to provide deeper insights into fishermen's sexual behavior and the accompanying health risks.

The primary objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of fishermen's sexual behavior and its associated health risks. Additionally, the study aims to formulate policy recommendations based on the cultural and social understanding of fishing communities. These recommendations are expected to provide relevant solutions for reducing risky sexual behaviors among fishermen. This research also contributes to enriching the literature on sexual health, particularly for marginalized groups that have received limited academic attention.

The literature review indicates that fishermen's sexual behavior is significantly influenced by their occupational mobility. Fauzi (2018) highlights that fishermen experience social situations distinct from the general population due to their prolonged periods away from home (Fauzi, 2018, 45–60). This condition triggers extramarital behavior or unsafe sexual practices, accelerating the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (Fauzi, 2018, 45–60). Surbakti (2020) adds that instability in fishermen's family lives increases their likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behavior at ports. Although the prevalence of CSW use in coastal areas is reported to be high (Widodo et al., 2019, 89–102), in-depth studies on its cultural roots remain scarce. Therefore, research must analyze how fishermen's social norms facilitate

these risky behaviors.

The principal theoretical framework relevant to analyzing this ecology of masculinity is the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity. This concept explains how dominant forms of masculinity shape social norms and regulate individual behavior, including sexual expression. For fishermen, masculinity is often associated with physical strength, bravery, and sexual dominance. Ningsih and Hidayat (2018) found that in some communities, risky sexual behavior is perceived as a means of validating one's social status and masculinity (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2018, 87–99). These norms reinforce permissiveness toward casual sex or polygamy, which hinders health interventions (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2018, 87–99). Thus, dominant sexual behaviors on land are expressions of masculinity that are ecologically constructed by their profession.

To understand the drivers of risky behavior, the theoretical framework of Stress and Coping may be applied. The fishing profession often induces intense stress due to social isolation and heavy workloads. Studies highlight that stress significantly influences individuals' coping mechanisms, including sexual behavior. Fishermen facing emotional isolation tend to seek release through unsafe sexual relations as a coping strategy. Suryani's (2021) findings support that isolation and economic stress make fishermen vulnerable to risky sexual behaviors (Suryani, 2021, 99–109). Therefore, isolation at sea produces stress that fishermen mitigate through sexual expression on land.

Economic pressure has also been shown to be another structural factor influencing fishermen's sexual behavior. Income instability and poverty frequently trigger stress that leads to irrational sexual decisions (Surbakti, 2020, 75–88). Surbakti (2020) observed that economic difficulties correlate with increased involvement in risky sexual behaviors, such as visiting CSWs. This economic context indicates that sexual behavior cannot be separated from the hardships faced by fishing communities. In some cases, fishermen even engage in covert prostitution to supplement their unstable income. Rahman and Sugiharto (2019) also emphasize the contribution of socioeconomic factors to variations in risky sexual behavior (Rahman & Sugiharto, 2019, 34–47).

The Structure–Agency theoretical framework (Sari & Pramono, 2019, 123–136; Rahmawati & Sulistyowati, 2023, 67–82) is relevant for analyzing the complexity of fishermen's behavior. This theory emphasizes that individual decision-making (agency) is influenced and constrained by social structures such as culture and economic conditions. While fishermen possess autonomy, their sexual behaviors are shaped by permissive social norms and pressing economic realities. Rigid patriarchal structures, for example, influence family dynamics and wives' tolerance of their husbands' extramarital activities (Sari & Pramono, 2019, 123–136; Surbakti, 2020, 75–88). This perspective demonstrates that interventions must target not only

individuals but also the cultural and economic structures surrounding them.

Other literature also highlights barriers to accessing sexual health information and services. The Ministry of Health (2019) reports that fishermen's knowledge of STI prevention and reproductive health remains very low. Exacerbated by the lack of adequate health facilities in coastal areas, fishermen have difficulty obtaining the services they need. Beyond these structural barriers, local cultural factors also play a role, including strong stigma against condom use, which is believed to diminish sexual pleasure (Pratiwi & Nurdin, 2020, 178–195). The combination of low knowledge, limited access, and cultural resistance heightens the risk of STI transmission in fishing communities.

## Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method to examine the sexual behavior of fishermen in a coastal community. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of the cultural, psychological, and social contexts underlying fishermen's behavior. The case study method provides a framework for obtaining rich contextual descriptions of the specific dynamics within the coastal community. This design is appropriate for uncovering how the ecology of masculinity (alienation versus dominance) operationally influences sexual decision-making. The choice of a qualitative approach and case study aligns with research design principles aimed at gaining deep understanding of a phenomenon within its specific context (Creswell, 2014: 185–186). This research specifically captures the sexual behaviors of fishermen in coastal areas—an issue often overlooked in social studies—corresponding to the urgent need to understand sexual health risks in maritime communities (Zhao et al., 2022: 04022).

The research subjects consisted of fifteen fishermen residing in region X. The subjects were selected based on their direct involvement in fishing occupations and sexual activities relevant to the study. Additionally, the willingness to participate as informants was a primary requirement to ensure the depth of the data obtained. The southern coastal area of Jember was chosen because it is known for high mobility and prominent issues of risky sexual behavior, particularly related to poverty and interactions at the port (Yusuf, 2020: 89–102). Identifying the complex behavioral patterns of fishermen necessitates a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews, considering that isolation and job demands create behavioral vulnerabilities among mobile populations (Wicaksono, 2022: 45–58).

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. These interviews aimed to explore subjects' narratives regarding their experiences at sea, feelings of isolation, interpretations of masculinity, and patterns of sexual expression on land. Interview questions were designed to understand the factors driving risky sexual behaviors. All interview sessions were

audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of narrative data, a practice recognized as essential for maintaining rigor in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014: 190–191). The use of in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to explore local norms and beliefs specific to the coastal community that influence sexual expression (Pratiwi & Nurdin, 2020: 178–195).

In addition to in-depth interviews, this study also employed participant observation within the fishermen's residential environment and port areas. This observation was crucial for obtaining contextual portrayals of their social and economic daily life. To validate the findings, the study utilized source triangulation by interviewing family members and local community leaders. This multi-method approach ensured that the collected data were diverse in perspective and systematically verified (Santoso & Indrayani, 2023: 234–250). The collected data were then analyzed using a descriptive-interpretive approach. The initial stage of analysis involved identifying behavioral patterns emerging from interview transcripts and observation notes. These patterns were subsequently linked and interpreted within the socio-cultural context of the coastal community, where the processes of data reduction and display followed a systematic qualitative data analysis framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 10–12). Interpretation focused on causal relationships between structural pressures (economic hardship, isolation) and manifestations of risky behaviors (Rahman & Sugiharto, 2019: 34–47).

Data validity was ensured through member checking and focus group discussions (FGDs) to verify the accuracy of interpretation. Member checking was conducted by reconfirming the interpretations of findings with participants to ensure the accurate representation of their experiences. Furthermore, ethical considerations were strongly emphasized, including obtaining participants' consent through written informed consent forms prior to fieldwork. This ethical compliance aligns with qualitative research guidelines prioritizing participant protection in studies involving sensitive sexual issues (Rahmawati & Sulistyowati, 2023: 67–82), in which credible research design principles emphasize both ethics and data validation (Creswell, 2014: 215).

## **Results and Discussion**

This section presents and analyzes the key findings derived from the qualitative case study examining the Ecology of Fishermen's Masculinity in the southern coastal region of Jember Regency. The results confirm a complex causal relationship between the working conditions of fishermen and the manifestation of high-risk sexual behavior on land. The fishing profession is characterized by unique features such as high mobility and seasonal work patterns, requiring fishermen to spend days or even weeks at sea, far from their families and social environments. These conditions directly generate isolation at sea, which subsequently produces

accumulated biological and psychological pressures. These pressures are later manifested as Sexual Expression on Land, in which fishermen seek outlets for release. The consequence of this cycle is the high prevalence of risky sexual behavior in coastal areas. Accordingly, the analysis is systematically organized to unpack the triggers, cultural legitimations, and structural factors that exacerbate these risks.

The discussion is divided into three major sub-sections, each addressing the determinants of fishermen's complex sexual behaviors. The first sub-section, Isolation at Sea and Biological Needs, explores how prolonged isolation and unstable work conditions function as primary triggers that lead fishermen to seek emotional and sexual compensation. The second sub-section, Hegemonic Masculinity and Sexual Dominance on Land, examines how dominant masculinity norms within fishing communities serve as a theoretical framework that legitimizes high-risk sexual behavior as a means of validating social status and manhood. The third sub-section, Socio-Economic Context and Barriers to Health Access, analyzes the role of structural factors such as economic vulnerability and limited access to health services in worsening fishermen's susceptibility. This organizational structure aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of fishermen's behaviors, theoretically shaped by the interaction between individual agency and surrounding cultural/economic structures.

### **Isolation at Sea and Biological Needs**

The occupation of fishermen is characterized by high mobility and unpredictable seasonal patterns. Their activities often require expanding fishing grounds through the traditional practice of andon, which forces them to leave their families for days, weeks, or even months. This isolation at sea directly triggers accumulated biological and psychological pressures. The physical distance from their spouses presents significant challenges to fulfilling sexual needs. Such conditions situate fishermen as mobile men whose behaviors are heavily shaped by the demands of a highly mobile work environment. The prolonged separation keeps them detached from their families and social networks, creating a strong need for immediate compensation once they return to land.

Compensation for such isolation and pressure frequently materializes in extramarital sexual practices, which are found to be quite common among fishermen. Of the 125 respondents, more than half (65 respondents or 52%) admitted to regularly engaging in sexual relations with non-spousal partners. These risky and unsafe sexual practices are common even among younger and unmarried respondents. This behavior is influenced by long physical distances from family, giving them freedom to act with minimal social oversight. One respondent noted that during andon, they manage their own income from fish sales, making it an opportune moment to "buy services." Previous studies show that fishermen who frequently travel long distances are more vulnerable to risky sexual behavior (Wicaksono, 2022, 45–58). This

phenomenon is notably prevalent in coastal regions of Jember.

Ports and coastal areas function as ecological release valves for fishermen's biological and psychological needs. Observations indicate that every andon destination beach has a semi-illegal localization providing Direct Commercial Sex Workers. These localizations have flourished after the permanent closure of the TPST Puger site in 2007, ensuring easy access for fishermen. Additionally, there exists a phenomenon known as *oreng binek jukok*, referring to Indirect Sex Workers who accept fish as payment. This provides fishermen with alternative and easily negotiated sexual services on land. The transition from a hazardous offshore environment to a permissive land-based setting makes fishermen more inclined to engage in transactional sex. This condition is reinforced by local cultural norms that tend to be permissive of extramarital sexual behavior.

The primary motivation behind fishermen's engagement in high-risk sexual practices is sexual entertainment or "*obat batin*" (inner relief). This practice functions as a method to relieve stress and overcome dizziness (*poseng*) after being at sea. Based on Stress and Coping Theory, fishermen use risky sexual encounters as emotional release mechanisms from isolation and heavy work burdens (Suryani, 2021, 99–109; Wicaksono, 2022, 45–58). They perceive this as the only available entertainment, provided their households remain unaffected and their wives remain unaware. This coping mechanism is also situationally relevant among married respondents, including those whose spouses suffer permanent illness. Isolation at sea essentially forces them to seek fleeting yet risky forms of intimacy on land.

Risky sexual behavior is reflected in the low level of abstinence among fishermen before participating in Counseling/IEC programs. Overall, more than half (52%) regularly engaged in extramarital sexual activity. Among members of the Fishermen Association, none (0%) reported practicing abstinence prior to intervention. This pattern is further aggravated by findings regarding condom use: none (0%) of the respondents in any group had ever used condoms during sexual activities, whether with permanent or non-permanent partners. The absence of safe-sex practices strongly indicates that fishermen face a high risk of contracting STIs.

The extremely low condom use is primarily due to concerns about reduced sexual pleasure. Many respondents from the Fishermen Association and Savings Group argued that condoms obstruct genuine sensation. They asserted that no condom could match "*the original feeling*." Additional reasons include limited time and lack of access to condoms in coastal regions. Strong cultural stigma associating condom use with diminished sexual enjoyment further reinforces this barrier (Pratiwi & Nurdin, 2020, 178–195). Moreover, neither Direct Sex Workers nor semi-illegal localization managers enforce condom use.

During fishing seasons (*musim jukok*), the frequency of risky sexual encounters significantly increases. Direct Sex Workers and pimps described this

period as their “harvest season,” due to the surge in demand. These observations reinforce the causal relationship between fishermen’s economic cycles and risky sexual behavior. High mobility not only increases opportunities during and on, but also when fishermen return home. One respondent admitted that after coming back from sea, they often “buy services” before even returning home. The interplay between isolation at sea and accessible sexual opportunities on land creates an ecology of risk that places fishing communities among the most vulnerable groups.

High work mobility also occupies nearly all of fishermen’s time, resulting in very limited on-shore interactions. On average, they have only one full day off per week—Thursday night to Friday—due to a customary prohibition on sailing. During periods of scarcity, even this free time disappears as they may spend weeks or months at sea. This lack of available time becomes a major barrier preventing fishermen from accessing public services. Difficulty obtaining information about public services, including HIV/AIDS information, is a direct consequence. This marginal position—socially and politically—further exacerbates the cycle of risk.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity Culture and Sexual Dominance on Land**

The fishing communities in southern Jember are characterized by a strong patriarchal social structure and a culture of hegemonic masculinity. This cultural framework links a fisherman’s honor and social status to the manifestation of physical strength and sexual dominance on land. Risky sexual behaviors—such as extramarital relations—are perceived as a validation of social status and masculinity (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2018, 87–99). These norms significantly reinforce permissive attitudes toward casual sex or polygamy. Such expressions of masculinity operate as a psychological compensation mechanism after fishermen confront danger and uncertainty at sea. This ecology of masculinity explains how harsh work environments interact with dominant gender constructions (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2018, 87–99).

The distinctive cultural practices of fishing communities also shape their worldview, influencing their social system and cultural activities. Embedded within this worldview are values concerning the urgency of harmony, balance, and alignment between fishermen and the sea—constituting the primary cultural ideology. Traditional beliefs also integrate sexuality into professional worldviews, such as the notion that sexual intercourse before going to sea may bring good fortune. These values—though contradictory to family norms—are reinforced by peer pressure at ports, where fellow fishermen encourage one another to seek nighttime entertainment (Widodo et al., 2019, 89–102). This unified cultural system functions to regulate the broader normative and cultural activities of fishermen.

Manifestations of sexual dominance on land are evidenced by the high prevalence of fishermen contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as

syphilis (matakao) and gonorrhea (ganore). Most fishermen admitted to having experienced both types of STIs, indicating that risky sexual practices are deeply entrenched. Despite the prevalence of STIs, the majority of respondents prior to IEC (Information, Education, and Communication) activities did not believe that extramarital sexual relations could transmit HIV/AIDS. They argued that if the risk were real, most fishermen would already be infected with HIV/AIDS, yet syphilis remains the most common. This skeptical attitude is exacerbated by widespread disbelief among respondents regarding the reality and lethality of HIV/AIDS. Such doubts demonstrate the extremely low levels of awareness and concern about HIV/AIDS prior to intervention.

Internalized gender inequality within the patriarchal structure has serious implications for household-level prevention efforts. Fishermen's wives often feel they lack bargaining power to request condom use or encourage their husbands to undergo regular HIV testing. Women's economic dependence on their husbands is the primary structural factor. This dependence compels wives to tolerate extramarital sexual behavior to maintain financial stability (Rahmawati & Sulistyowati, 2023, 67–82). Women who resist such norms risk facing social stigma for “disturbing community harmony.” These rigid gender-role dynamics are reinforced by a Structure–Agency theoretical framework.

Strong cultural resistance also becomes a significant barrier to preventive practices, particularly condom use. Most respondents cited “sexual pleasure/satisfaction” as the primary reason for refusing condoms. Condoms are perceived as diminishing sexual satisfaction and reducing the “authentic sensation” of intercourse, as they block the release of semen inside the female partner. This stigma is deeply embedded among fishermen, posing a major challenge for sexual health education (Pratiwi & Nurdin, 2020, 178–195). Furthermore, neither Direct Commercial Sex Workers nor managers of “semi-illegal” prostitution sites enforce condom-use requirements. Condoms are viewed more as hindrances than protective tools, exacerbating the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission.

Despite differing motivations, members of the Pengajian (religious study) group exhibited relatively higher levels of awareness and abstinence before intervention. Their more favorable attitudes are associated with the inherent religious characteristics of this group, in contrast to the more secular Fishermen's Association. For Pengajian members, abstinence is rooted in religious motives—fear of sin and divine punishment for committing adultery. Nevertheless, overall awareness among all respondents regarding HIV/AIDS prior to IEC activities remained “very low or severely lacking.” Religiosity alone does not fully determine awareness, but it provides a qualitatively stronger motivational framework.

The practice of “turbo”, or bartering sexual services for fish, conducted by *oreng binek jukok* (Indirect Sex Workers), represents another form of the

commodification of women's bodies in coastal settings. These women operate individually and sporadically, offering non-cash transactional alternatives that are more accessible to fishermen. They accept fish in exchange for sexual services, linking fishermen's ecological work conditions with their sexual expression. One respondent explained that fishermen could obtain fish without paying in cash but instead repay the cost later through sexual transactions. Although less prominent than Direct Sex Workers in prostitution sites, *oreng binek jukok* remain significant due to the simplicity and affordability of the transactions. This bartering practice demonstrates the extent to which risky sexual behavior is normalized in the socio-economic life of fishing communities.

The ecology of fishermen's masculinity creates a vicious cycle of risk: isolation at sea generates biological and psychological pressures, while land-based cultural norms provide social justification for their release through high-risk behaviors. Sexual dominance—viewed as a marker of masculinity—has become a major barrier to health intervention efforts (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2018, 87–99). Work structures requiring high mobility intersect with cultural structures permissive of extramarital sex. Therefore, interventions must target not only individual factors but also these permissive cultural norms. Structural approaches to intervention must accommodate the socio-cultural characteristics of fishing communities in order to be effective.

### **Socio-Economic Context and Barriers to Health Access**

The vulnerable socio-economic context in which fishermen live represents a structural factor that exacerbates the risks associated with sexual behavior. The economic life of traditional fishermen is characterized by low capital, small-scale operations, and a predominantly subsistence mode of production. As a result, their average income tends to be low, and poverty is a common phenomenon. Income instability and the uncertainty of daily catch generate significant economic stress (Suryani, 2021, pp. 99–109). Such stress can lead fishermen to make irrational sexual decisions (Surbakti, 2020, pp. 75–88). Some even engage in covert forms of prostitution as a means of supplementing their unpredictable income (Kurniawan et al., 2021, pp. 145–160).

The low level of education among fishermen further increases their vulnerability to health risks and social marginalization. Most respondents have very limited educational attainment, with the majority not completing elementary school or its equivalent. This low level of education contributes to their social marginality, which is marked by persistent underdevelopment, including poor health and limited educational opportunities. The combination of poverty and minimal education restricts their ability to access and comprehend essential health information (Ministry of Health, 2019).

A critical finding of this study is the extremely low level of knowledge about

HIV/AIDS among all respondents prior to the implementation of the outreach/IEC program. Their knowledge was greatly influenced by whether or not they had been exposed to information about HIV/AIDS. All respondents confirmed that they had never encountered HIV/AIDS information through routine association activities, outreach workers, or IEC materials. A staff member from the Jember AIDS Commission acknowledged that existing HIV/AIDS prevention programs were primarily concentrated on direct sex workers in localization areas. Implicitly, fishermen had “simply never been considered” as a target group. This weak exposure reflects a major institutional failure contributing to the fishermen’s very limited knowledge.

The political and social marginality of fishermen is also reflected in their difficulty accessing information on public services. Their occupation, which requires long working hours at sea, creates a substantial barrier to interacting on land and accessing services. Limited time onshore was the primary reason respondents reported having neither the time nor opportunity to undergo STI screening or HIV testing prior to the IEC intervention. This lack of access makes it difficult for fishermen to obtain accurate information on STI prevention and reproductive health—despite the elevated risks associated with the high prevalence of STIs such as syphilis and gonorrhea within this population.

Limited access to adequate health services in coastal areas further exacerbates the risk situation faced by fishermen (Ministry of Health, 2019). Comprehensive sexual health services remain difficult to access for most fishermen. The lack of infrastructure restricts their ability to obtain essential preventive services such as STI screening or VCT testing. This is reflected in the extremely low level of health-seeking behavior among respondents prior to the IEC program: none had ever undergone STI examinations or HIV testing (VCT). This lack of access contributes to the increasing spread of sexually transmitted infections within fishing communities.

Despite the significant increase in knowledge and attitudes following the intervention, the habituation of consistent health-seeking behavior has not developed as expected. During the post-IEC in-depth interviews and FGD, none of the respondents reported having undergone STI screening or VCT. The intention to seek medical services at community health centers or hospitals remained merely an intention and had not translated into actual behavior. Respondents cited lack of time—due to the highly mobile nature of their work—as the primary barrier. Shame and fear of being seen by others were also strong deterrents to using formal health facilities. Reluctance to wait in line was a secondary reason why respondents preferred self-medication with over-the-counter antibiotics (e.g., supertetra) or visiting informal practitioners.

The fishermen’s inability to translate their newly acquired awareness into

sustainable health-seeking behavior can be explained by structural barriers. The increase in knowledge likely reached only a level of discursive consciousness, insufficient to overcome daily structural constraints. Long working hours at sea and the demands of constant mobility continue to hinder access to healthcare facilities. Shame and stigma surrounding sexual illnesses serve as cultural barriers preventing them from seeking help through formal healthcare channels. This demonstrates that their behavior is constrained by entrenched social and economic structures, where improved knowledge is insufficient to overcome structural hardship (Sari & Pramono, 2019, pp. 123–136; Rahmawati & Sulistyowati, 2023, pp. 67–82).

The consequences of this complex interaction of factors are evident in the rising trend of HIV/AIDS cases in the southern coastal region of Jember Regency. Four of the five districts with the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence—Puger, Gumukmas, Wuluhan, and Ambulu—are coastal areas. This increase indicates transmission from key populations to the general population. The most alarming finding is that the majority of cases (169 cases, or 23.03% as of September 2012) involve housewives. This highlights a critical failure of prevention programs that focus exclusively on key populations. Once HIV/AIDS penetrates households through married women, the risk of transmission to infants and children becomes imminent. Therefore, holistic interventions are urgently needed, emphasizing economic empowerment, health literacy, and cultural norm transformation (Pratama & Kusuma, 2024, pp. 45–60)..

## Conclusion

The sexual behavior of fishermen in the southern coastal region of Jember Regency constitutes a highly complex socio-cultural phenomenon shaped by the unique ecology of their occupation. Isolation at sea—arising from high mobility and social detachment—serves as a central trigger for unmet biological and psychological needs. The expression of these needs on land often manifests in risky sexual behaviors, including extramarital relations and the use of commercial sex services (Widodo et al., 2019, pp. 89–102). A hegemonic masculinity culture provides social justification for these practices, framing sexual dominance as a form of status validation (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2018, pp. 87–99). The intersection of these factors places fishermen and their families at significant risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS (Purnomo et al., 2020, pp. 210–225).

An ecological masculinity approach suggests that fishermen's behaviors are responses to the structural and environmental pressures surrounding them. Economic instability intensifies their vulnerability, driving some fishermen to engage in commercial sexual activities as a means of survival (Kurniawan et al., 2021, pp. 145–160; Suryani, 2021, pp. 99–109). Other structural barriers include limited knowledge of sexual health (Jember District Health Office, 2022) and inadequate access to comprehensive prevention services (Ministry of Health, 2019). Gender inequality

within fishermen households further exacerbates the situation, as wives often lack the power to negotiate safe sexual practices (Rahmawati & Sulistyowati, 2023, pp. 67–82). Addressing these issues thus requires consideration of the complex interplay between individual and structural factors.

To mitigate risky sexual behaviors among fishermen, comprehensive, holistic, and culturally sensitive intervention strategies are essential. Policy recommendations should include the enhancement of community-based sexual health literacy, involving religious figures and local leaders to improve cultural acceptance (Nugroho et al., 2021, pp. 302–315). Additionally, improving access to adequate health facilities and services in coastal areas must be prioritized as a structural response (Pratama & Kusuma, 2024, pp. 45–60). Efforts should also focus on strengthening fishermen's economic conditions to reduce the pressures that drive irrational sexual decision-making. By understanding and addressing the dichotomy between isolation at sea and sexual expression on land, the overall well-being of fishing communities can be significantly improved.

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