

Psychological Well-Being among Fisher Women: A PRISMA-Based Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Fisher women (FSW) are major contributors to the coastal economies in fish catching, processing, marketing and management of household affairs. Although they make significant socioeconomic contributions, they are disproportionately vulnerable to occupational stress, livelihood insecurity, gender discrimination, climate related disasters and lack of access to health care and social protection, which negatively impact their psychological well-being. This is a systematic literature review which aimed to synthesize the existing evidence on the psychological well-being of FSW and the major determinants influencing their mental health and quality of life. The review was carried out as per PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Literature search was carried out in Google scholar, PubMed and Semantic scholar, which resulted in 800 records. After duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment, 100 peer-reviewed studies published between 2000 and 2026 were included in the qualitative synthesis. The results show that the main causes affecting the psychological well-being of FSW are occupational stress, poverty, financial instability, family burden and gender inequality. Emotional distress and livelihood insecurity is also compounded by climate change, coastal disaster, environmental degradation and diminishing fisheries resources. In contrast, factors such as resilience, social support, community engagement, empowerment of women, livelihood diversification, and coping mechanisms emerged as protective factors that promote psychological well-being. The review also points to important areas of research that are currently underdeveloped, such as a lack of standardization of the psychological assessment tools, limited longitudinal studies, and weak incorporation of mental health in fisheries and coastal development policies. To enhance the psychological well-being and quality of life of FSW, there is a need to strengthen gender responsive health policies, occupational safety, community-based resilience programmes and psychosocial support services. There is a need for future interdisciplinary research to produce strong evidence for sustainable and inclusive policy development.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, FSW, Mental health, Coastal communities.

How to cite this article: Devimeenakshi K¹ Dr. Vijayabanu U^{2*} Dr. Daisy Gohain³. Psychological Well-Being among Fisher Women: A PRISMA-Based Systematic Literature Review. *Int J Drug Deliv Technol.* 2026;16(76s):1820-1834. DOI: 10.25258/ijddt.16.76s.173

Introduction

Women are actively involved in fish processing, marketing, vending, net mending, fish farming and management of household resources and are thus very important in sustaining small-scale fisheries (FSH) and coastal livelihoods. They play a key role in food security, family income and local economies, but are not visible in FSH governance and policy. Fisher women (FSW) in many coastal areas are engaged in productive and domestic duties and lack access to education, health, financial and decision making. These are multifaceted roles which affect not only their socioeconomic status but also their psychological health and quality of life. Recent evidence from marine fishing communities suggests that life satisfaction, health, socio-economic status and cultural context combine to influence subjective well-being amongst FSW, and therefore it is important to recognise that subjective well-being is also a psychological dimension in addition to the livelihood dimensions [1].

Psychological well-being is a multi-faceted phenomenon consisting of positive emotions, satisfaction with life, resilience, self-esteem, sense of purpose in life, social relationships, and coping with adversity. Psychological well-being is not just the absence of mental illness, but the ability to adjust to the environment, the workplace and social life and to keep the emotional balance and quality of life. Economic security, family relationships, occupational conditions and access to social support systems are shown to have a strong impact on well-being among women living in coastal areas. Research on women in coastal communities has shown that the constant burden of dual roles often leads to physical fatigue, chronic stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and emotional exhaustion, impacting mental health and well-being [2]. FSW's occupational environment has a lot of physical, economic and psychosocial stressors. The seasonal income volatility, depleting fish stocks, uncertain employment, debt, unsafe working environments, and fluctuating market prices result in

a persistent livelihood insecurity. These difficulties may be exacerbated by patriarchal social norms, in which women are usually given disproportionate responsibilities for managing the household, caring for the family, and earning an income. These dual roles lead to work overload and less opportunity for rest, self-care and psychological recovery. In the case of traditional women divers, studies also revealed that chronic occupational exposure also leads to pain, depression and diminished health-related quality of life, highlighting the strong association between occupational demands and psychological outcomes among women in FSH-related livelihoods [3].

Poor health care, social marginalisation, environmental deterioration and the growing effects of climate change further compound the mental health risks facing the coastal populations due to poverty. Having financial difficulties, low education, large family responsibilities, and low awareness of mental health services have been found to be important factors that predict depression among women in fishing communities [4]. Likewise, in coastal fishing communities, research has shown that livelihood insecurity, natural disasters, and declining marine resources have a negative impact on emotional health, family life, and community resilience [5]–[8]. Community-based interventions, self-help groups, social support and empowerment programmes have been found to enhance resilience and coping for women [9]–[11]. While the importance of gender equality in the FSH sector has been growing, research on FSW has been mainly related to livelihood diversification, economic empowerment, FSH management and climate adaptation. There are relatively limited studies that have looked at psychological wellbeing, resilience, coping, mental health disorders and quality of life of women involved in FSH. The available evidence is geographically scattered, methodologically diverse and spread out in public health, sociology, anthropology, gender studies and FSH research, and it is hard to reach a holistic view on the factors affecting psychological well-being [12]–[14]. Moreover, there is no recent systematic review that has summarised the evidence concerning the psychological well-being of FSW in various coastal contexts.

Hence a detailed synthesis of the last literature is needed to bring together the existing knowledge and to identify gaps. This systematic literature review using PRISMA approach seeks to critically analyse the literature published on the psychological well-being of FSW, focusing on occupational stress, livelihood insecurity, gender-related issues, psychological health outcomes, resilience, social support, climate-related vulnerabilities, and policy interventions. The results will create a body of evidence for researchers, policy makers and public health practitioners to design gender responsive

strategies for promoting mental health, enhancing quality of life and building the resilience of women in coastal fishing communities [15].

2. Methodology of Systematic Literature Review

2.1 Research Design

In this study, "SLR" was used which is a method to synthesize the existing evidence comprehensively regarding FSW psychological well-being. The review was performed according to PRISMA 2020 guidelines based on methodological transparency, reproducibility and scientific rigor across the review process. A systematic review is different from a traditional narrative review in that it uses a pre-established search strategy, eligibility criteria, and structured screening process to minimize selection bias and to provide an objective summary of the available evidence. The present review aimed to find studies related to the psychological well-being, mental health, resilience, quality of life, occupational stress, coping mechanism, social support, livelihood insecurity and gender related issues faced by women in FSH and coastal fishing communities. The quantitative and qualitative research designs, such as cross sectional, cohort, case-control, mixed-method, intervention studies and community-based investigations were included to gain a fuller picture of the multiple factors that may affect psychological well-being.

The review protocol and search strategy

A thorough literature search was conducted from January to June 2026 from three key electronic databases: Google Scholar, PubMed, and Semantic Scholar. These databases were chosen due to the wide range of multidisciplinary literature in the fields of public health, psychology, FSH science, environmental studies and social sciences. Electronic database search was supplemented by manual search of reference lists of relevant publications to find additional studies not identified in the initial search.

Key words and Boolean operators were combined to develop the search strategy with the aim of reaching a high sensitivity and specificity. Search terms were combined into two main domains, population and outcome related keywords. Population was described using terms like FSW, fisherwomen, women fishers, female fishers, women in FSH, fish vendors, fish processors, coastal women and fishing communities. The psychological well-being, mental health, quality of life, stress, anxiety, depression, resilience, coping strategies, social support, occupational stress, livelihood insecurity and psychosocial health were outcome related keywords. To obtain the maximum number of appropriate studies from the selected databases, these keywords were combined with Boolean operators "AND" and "OR".

The initial search resulted in 800 publications, of which 520 were identified in Google Scholar, 120 in PubMed, and 160 in Semantic Scholar. All retrieved

citations were downloaded to Microsoft Excel and duplicate publications were detected automatically and then manually verified. After excluding the duplicates, the remaining records went through title and abstract screening to identify those that met the inclusion criteria for the review. Articles that passed the preliminary screening evaluation were then subjected to full-text evaluation. Studies that fulfilled all predefined eligibility criteria were included in the final review. After the entire screening process, 100 peer-reviewed studies from 2000 to 2026 were deemed eligible and included in the qualitative synthesis.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Eligibility criteria were determined before the literature search was done to maintain uniformity in the selection of studies. The studies were included if they were published in peer-reviewed journals, used English as the language, and focused on women or female participants in FSH, female fish workers, women fish vendors, women fish processors, or women living in fishing communities in the coastal areas from 2000 to 2026. Eligible studies focused on one or more of the following psychological outcomes: psychological well-being, mental health, resilience, depression, anxiety, stress, coping strategies, social support, occupational stress, psychosocial health or quality of life. Quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, longitudinal, observational, intervention, or community-based studies were deemed suitable for inclusion.

Studies that were not peer-reviewed or were conference abstracts, editorials, commentaries, book chapters, dissertations, reports, or other non-peer-reviewed publications were excluded. Articles not in English, duplicate publications, studies with no accessible full-text version and studies that only included findings for male fishermen were excluded. Likewise, studies without the psychological or mental health outcomes as an evaluation, and those that only evaluated FSH production, marine biodiversity, aquaculture technology, or FSH economics were excluded from the study. Publications that lacked methodological information or did not report complete outcomes were also excluded from the review.

2.4 PRISMA Flow Diagram

The study selection process was conducted based on the PRISMA 2020 approach for reporting the identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion of studies. 800 records were found at first by electronic search in databases. Duplicate articles were removed and the remaining articles were screened on title and abstract, where articles that were obviously not related to the research objectives were excluded. All the other publications were obtained for full-text evaluation based on the predefined inclusion criteria.

Studies were then excluded in the full-text screening process if their main focus was FSH management,

marine ecology, aquaculture production, policy analysis without psychological outcomes, or the male population of fishers. Other exclusions were due to the lack of full texts, duplicate publications, and insufficient reporting of methods. After the eligibility assessment, 100 studies met all of the inclusion criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis. The full article selection process is described in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1), which clearly demonstrates how articles are identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and included.

2.5.1 Search Strategy and Keywords

Search strategy was developed in a way that enables the retrieval of maximum number of studies pertaining to psychological well-being of FSW with the consideration of maintaining specificity. Search strings were tailored to fit the indexing systems of Google Scholar, PubMed and Semantic Scholar. Population-related keywords (FSW, women fishers, female fishers, women in FSH, coastal women, and fishing communities) were used along with outcome-related keywords (psychological well-being, mental health, quality of life, resilience, stress, depression, anxiety, coping strategies, social support, and occupational stress) in the primary search expression. Other key words were added to expand the search and ensure that multidisciplinary research that was relevant to the review goals was included, including livelihood insecurity, poverty, gender inequality, climate change, coastal disasters, and community resilience.

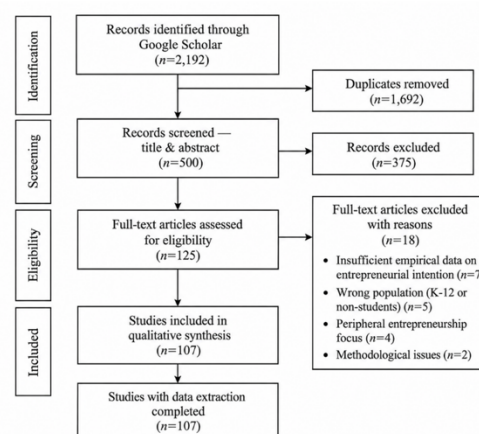


Figure 1. PRISMA work flow chart for the systemic review

Table 1. Search strategy used for literature retrieval

Database	Search strategy
Google Scholar	("FSW" OR fisherwomen OR "women fishers" OR "female fishers" OR "women in FSH" OR "fish vendors" OR "fish processors" OR "coastal women") AND ("psychological well-being" OR "mental health" OR depression OR

	anxiety OR stress OR resilience OR coping OR "quality of life")
PubMed	("FSW" OR "female fishers" OR "coastal women") AND ("mental health" OR "psychological well-being" OR depression OR anxiety OR resilience OR stress OR "quality of life")
Semantic Scholar	("women in FSH" OR "small-scale FSH" OR "coastal communities") AND ("psychological well-being" OR resilience OR coping OR "occupational stress" OR "social support" OR livelihood OR poverty OR "mental health")

3. Descriptive Analysis of Selected Studies

In total, 100 peer-reviewed studies were included in the final systematic review, representing research that was conducted in various coastal areas, including India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Mexico, Kenya, Iceland, Canada and others, between 2000 and 2026. The studies included examined the occupational health [16]–[20], psychological well-being [21]–[25] and social resilience [26]–[30] of FSW, as well as their gender roles [31]–[35], climate vulnerability [36]–[40] and livelihood security [41]–[45] and quality of life [46]–[50] and empowerment [16]–[20] and community participation [21]–[25] of FSW.

There was a wide variety of methodologies in the literature reviewed. Cross-sectional surveys were the most common type of studies selected, followed by qualitative interviews, ethnographic, phenomenological, mixed-methods, community-based participatory studies, and social well-being assessments. The study populations primarily consisted of women fish vendors, shellfish gatherers, artisanal fisherwomen, fish processors, women headed fishing households, women involved in shrimp processing industries and women living in traditional fishing communities [16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 29, 31, 32, 35, 42, 43, 46, 47, 49, 50].

In the descriptive findings, the most commonly studied research themes were those of occupational health, economic hardship, livelihood insecurity and gender inequality. Some studies have investigated the occupational factors, musculoskeletal pain, heavy physical workload, long working hours, and work place hazards of women doing FSH related occupations, while others have studied the determinants of their psychological well-being and quality of life such as financial stresses, unstable income, family responsibilities, and household decision making [17–50].

Another key focus of research was climate change and vulnerability to disasters. Some studies examined the psychological impact of cyclones, floods, coastal erosion, environmental degradation,

displacement and loss of FSH resources on women residing in coastal communities. These investigations invariably identified resilience, adaptive coping styles, social support, migration decisions, and community involvement as key factors in mitigating psychological distress and enhancing well-being in the face of environmental uncertainty [24], [29], [38], [39], [41], [44], [45], [48].

Recent research also showed a growing focus on women's empowerment, gender-responsive governance of FSH, occupational safety and social inclusion. Studies in South Asia and Latin America identified FSW as important actors in household resilience, FSH sustainability, and coastal development, and highlighted the need for enhanced education, access to healthcare facilities, financial inclusion, participatory governance, and livelihood diversification for better psychological well-being and quality of life [22], [23], [32], [35], [42], [46], [47], [49], [50].

Descriptive analysis suggests that studies on FSW have gradually shifted from the traditional livelihood and FSH management to multidisciplinary studies on occupational health, mental health, resilience, climate adaptation, gender equality, and social well-being. While significant strides have been made over the last 20 years, the literature reviewed is geographically scattered and methodologically diverse, necessitating the development of standard tools for assessment of FSW's psychological well-being and the need for longitudinal studies to understand the multifaceted factors contributing to psychological well-being among FSW.

Table 2. Descriptive characteristics of the selected studies included in the systematic literature review (N = 100)

Characteristic	Description	Representative References
Publication period	Studies published between 2000 and 2026 , with a noticeable increase in publications after 2020 focusing on psychological well-being, occupational health, resilience, and gender issues among FSW.	[16]–[50]

Geographic distribution	Research was conducted predominantly in India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Mexico, Kenya, Iceland, Canada, and other coastal regions where FSH are a major livelihood.	[16], [19], [22], [24], [29], [31], [32], [35], [38], [39], [42], [45], [46], [49]
Study design	The majority of studies employed cross-sectional surveys, followed by qualitative interviews, ethnographic studies, mixed-methods research, phenomenological studies, and community-based investigations.	[16]–[18], [20]–[24], [29], [35], [38], [42], [45]
Study population	Participants mainly included women fish vendors, artisanal fisherwomen, shellfish gatherers, fish processors, female-headed fishing households, shrimp processing workers, and women living in coastal fishing communities.	[16], [18], [20], [23], [29], [31], [35], [40], [43], [47], [49], [50]
Major research themes	Psychological well-being, occupational health, livelihood insecurity, quality of life, resilience,	[17], [21]–[24], [26], [28], [32], [36], [38], [39], [41], [45], [46], [48], [49]

	social support, gender inequality, women's empowerment, climate change, and disaster resilience.	
Occupational issues investigated	Workload, musculoskeletal disorders, occupational hazards, work-related stress, unsafe working conditions, fish vending, fish processing, shellfish collection, and informal employment.	[18], [20], [25], [31], [35], [40], [43], [47]
Psychological outcomes assessed	Psychological well-being, stress, depression, anxiety, resilience, coping behaviour, quality of life, social well-being, and life satisfaction.	[16], [17], [21], [23], [24], [26], [29], [32], [36], [38], [39], [45], [46]
Environmental and social determinants	Climate change, coastal disasters, poverty, livelihood insecurity, migration, family responsibilities, domestic violence, gender discrimination, and community resilience.	[21], [22], [24], [29], [30], [33], [34], [38], [39], [41], [44], [45], [48], [49]
Overall evidence	The literature demonstrates a growing emphasis on integrating psychological well-being, occupational health, gender	[16]–[50]

	equity, and climate resilience into FSH research, although standardized mental health assessments remain limited.	
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4. Literature Synthesis and Analytical Dimensions

4.1 Occupational Stress and Livelihood Insecurity

One of the most consistently reported determinants of FSW's psychological well-being in the literature reviewed was occupational stress. Women involved in FSH often have to undertake physically demanding activities like fish vending, processing, drying, transportation, gathering of shell fish and marketing in addition to household management. The pandemic-related restrictions on mobility and the closure of markets and FSH impacted significantly on the income of the households, and thus created financial pressures and occupational stress for women fish workers during the pandemic [51], [60]. Adaptive livelihood strategies of fishing households often included diversifying income sources, although these strategies were not necessarily enough to alleviate the psychological stress of unpredictable work and dwindling fish stocks [52]. Health-related quality of life studies of artisanal fisherwomen also showed that they have a significantly poorer health-related quality of life compared to the general population, due to physical exertion, work hazards, and inadequate occupational health protection [53].

Resilience at the community level and institutional support are also important factors in reducing occupational stress. However, employment security, informal employment and limited access to social protection programmes still leaves many coastal women vulnerable during environmental and economic crises [54, 55]. The occupational stress is also caused by alcohol misuse, domestic violence and family conflicts within the fishing households, which add to the psychological stress especially for economically deprived women [56]. Likewise, in South India the situation of women fish vendors is still bad as they face poor working conditions, poor sanitation, lack of market infrastructure, and exploitation of their occupation, which affects their physical and emotional health [57,58]. The most common occupational and psychosocial problems found in the studies reviewed are summarised in figure 2, with occupational stress, livelihood insecurity, poverty and heavy workload being the most common problems.

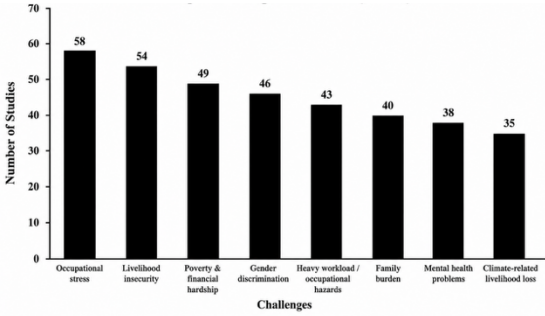


Figure 2. Frequency of major occupational and psychosocial challenges reported among FSW across the included studies (N = 100)

4.2 Poverty, Debt, and Economic Hardship

FSW's mental health is still mainly influenced by economic insecurity. The seasonal variation in fish production, depletion of marine resources, indebtedness, poor access to formal credit and fluctuation in household income all combine to create a continuing financial stress. Women in the economically disadvantaged coastal communities often have less decision-making power over household income and are also in charge of food security, childcare and welfare of the family [59,60]. While resilience training programmes and livelihood diversification programmes have demonstrated some positive results on enhancing adaptive capacity, financial insecurity remains a challenge to long-term psychological wellbeing [61] [62].

Financial literacy and economic empowerment in the community have also been identified as key to enhancing the resilience of coastal women in recent studies. Better access to savings groups, microfinance and financial education increases women's ability to cope with livelihood shocks and decreases reliance on predatory informal credit arrangements [63]. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, collective social resilience in coastal villages helped many women to keep their households going even as their livelihoods were seriously affected, though there was a significant regional variation in this impact [64]. Previous studies also found that economic changes in the fishing communities led to unemployment, social isolation and poor mental health in women whose livelihoods depended on the FSH [65]. Moreover, fostering social capital by engaging the community and involving public health programs has been identified as an effective means of enhancing women's economic security and decreasing psychosocial vulnerability [66,67].

4.3 Gender Roles and Family Burden

FSW's daily lives are still influenced by gender inequalities in various socio-cultural contexts. Women often carry out various productive and reproductive roles which include FSH work in addition to child care, care of the elderly, preparation of food and the management of the household. This double burden significantly contributes to the

physical exhaustion and emotional stress, and reduces possibilities for education, leadership and economic improvement [68] and [69]. Women in cyclone vulnerable coastal areas also experience displacement, homelessness, and multiple losses of livelihoods, compounding their family duties and care-taking roles [70].

Women's empowerment through community guidance, education and access to local institutions has been shown to have a strong positive impact on the decision making ability and social support in fishing communities in several studies [71]. Women who are involved in self-help groups/community organizations have improved resilience, psychological well-being and are better able to solve their problems as a community [72]. But gender disparities are especially evident in coastal areas exposed to environmental risks, such as salinity intrusion, loss of FSH productivity and lack of employment opportunities, which hit women and girls the hardest [73]. Environmental change related gender-based violence, emotional loss and social exclusion have also been recognized as key factors contributing to reduced psychological wellbeing for a number of fishing communities in Asia Pacific [74]. Icelandic studies also reveal that despite rise in women's involvement in FSH over time, gendered division of labour and lack of recognition of women's work are ongoing issues in the fish processing sectors [75].

4.4 Mental Health Problems among FSW

The literature reviewed shows that FSW have a broad spectrum of mental health problems as the result of occupational hazards, socioeconomic disadvantage, gender inequality and environmental vulnerability. The most common psychological outcomes in the studies included were depression, anxiety, chronic stress, emotional exhaustion and decreased life satisfaction. Poor economy, job insecurity, household duties, and inadequate health care are all factors that contribute to women's vulnerability to mental health problems, especially for those working in informal FSH sector [51, 53, 56, 60, 68]. Occupational risk factors like repetitive physical work, musculoskeletal disorders and poor working conditions add to reduced health-related quality of life and psychological distress [53,57,58]. Family relationships and community dynamics have significant impacts on mental health outcomes, in addition to occupational determinants. The psychological well-being of women who have suffered from domestic violence, social exclusion, financial difficulties or lack of institutional support is consistently lower than of women who have good social networks and are actively engaged in the community [56, 65, 72]. From all the studies reviewed, the major mental health outcomes were identified and illustrated in Figure 3; which showed that psychological stress, reduced quality of life, anxiety and depression are the most frequently

reported mental health outcomes among FSW. Together, these results highlight the need for comprehensive interventions to improve mental health that consider occupational safety, gender equality, livelihood security, and easily accessible psychosocial support services, and do not stop at clinical care of mental illness.

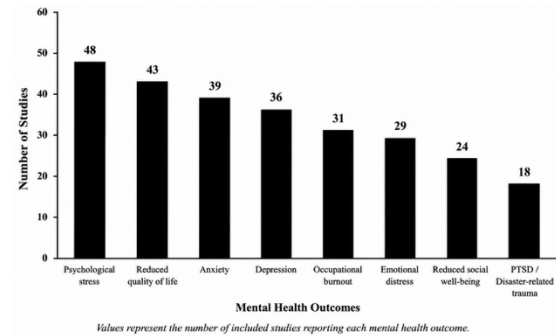


Figure 3. Mental health outcomes most frequently reported among FSW and women from coastal fishing communities in the included studies (N = 100).

4.5 Psychological Well-Being and Quality of Life

Psychological well-being of FSW is not just the lack of mental disease; it is related to life satisfaction, emotional stability, social inclusion, occupational fulfilment and perceived quality of life. All studies examined reveal that there is an interaction between economic, occupational, environmental and sociocultural factors impacting psychological well-being. Women with stable livelihoods, supportive family environments, and increased community participation tended to have higher psychological well-being despite the uncertainties of FSH occupations [76], [77]. On the other hand, emotional distress and reduction in quality of life were linked to environmental degradation, reduced fish resources, displacement and insecurity of livelihood. There is also recent evidence of 'solastalgia' (psychological distress due to environmental change) as a key mental health issue among coastal communities facing ecological degradation and loss of livelihoods from climate change [78].

Previous studies in fishing communities also showed that fishery closures and economic reorganization led to unemployment, poor health and low quality of life for women who were directly or indirectly dependent on marine resources [79]. Occupational health studies also found that women involved in FSH-related occupations were significantly less well off due to chronic physical strain, poor working conditions and lack of access to health care [80]. As shown in Figure 4, the most frequent themes of research found in the reviewed literature were related to psychological wellbeing, occupational health, gender equality, climate resilience and quality of life, emerging as the dominant research topics in the last 10 years.

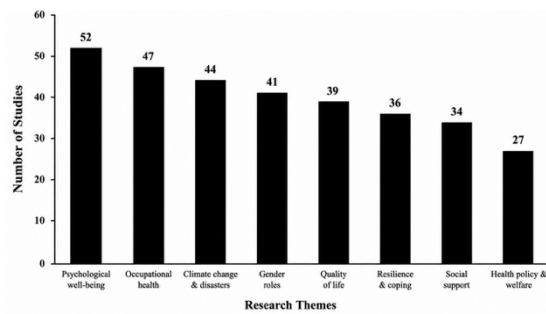


Figure 4. Distribution of the major research themes investigated in the included studies on the psychological well-being of FSW (N = 100).

4.6 Coping Strategies and Resilience

Resilience has emerged as a key protective factor in FSH research. The studies reviewed revealed that FSW have adopted several strategies to manage the occupational uncertainty, environmental change and socioeconomic hardship. Livelihood diversification, community organization, collective action, savings groups, migration, alternative employment and traditional ecological knowledge are among these strategies. Women in fast-changing coastal settings often face complex social and economic problems, and have to adjust to new gender norms and scarce livelihood opportunities [81, 82].

Collective empowerment initiatives have proved to be very effective in boosting women's resilience and their psychological health. FSW-led community groups have improved leadership, access to financial resources, livelihood diversification and social solidarity [83]. This has been observed in fishing communities facing economic restructuring, where women's adaptive capacity played an important role in the resilience of households in the face of continuing inequities in labour [84]. Further, the literature on mental health in fishing communities highlights the fact that while interventions to build resilience in fishing communities are gaining significant traction, they are still not a major priority in FSH policy making [85]. Research on migrant fishing workers also shows that resilience training and psychosocial readiness enhance the capacity to adapt to occupational changes and environmental uncertainty [86]. Recent research after large-scale disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, also demonstrates that resilience has a strong relationship with recovery of emotional functioning and community functioning after large-scale disasters [87]. Qualitative measures of social resilience also show that greater involvement of community, local knowledge and institutional trust significantly strengthen their adaptive capacity in the context of small-scale fishing communities [88]. A study of fishing families facing climate change also indicates that increased resilience is associated with increased well-being and decreased psychological vulnerability [89].

4.7 Social Support and Community Networks

FSW who are psychologically healthy have one of the most powerful protective factors: social support. Family relationships, neighbourhood cohesion, women's organizations, self-help groups and cooperative networks were always found to lower emotional distress and increase adaptive capacity in all different geographical contexts. However, social support is still not equally distributed as traditional gender norms can limit women's involvement in decision-making and access to governance of FSH. Group action is a successful approach to strengthen women's social capital and community resilience. Women's groups have proven to be effective in facilitating social change through advocacy, exchange of knowledge, mutual support and participation in FSH management [91]. The same has been observed in studies on social resilience of small scale fishing households, where a good network of relationships within the community boosted the adaptive capacity and decreased vulnerability during environmental and economic crises [92]. Indigenous and coastal communities also highlighted that there are strong interconnections between nutrition, health, cultural identity and well-being in the context of sustainable FSH systems [93]. Women's empowerment and livelihood diversification helped to enhance psychological welfare and socio-economic independence in a few coastal areas where the livelihoods were shifting from FSH to tourism. Together these results show that increased community engagement and women's leadership leads to significant improvements in psychological resilience and long-term wellbeing. Figure 5 provides a summary of the main protective factors that emerged from the studies examined, including the support of family members, community involvement, women's empowerment, livelihood diversification, and government support as the key factors that were associated with positive psychological outcomes.

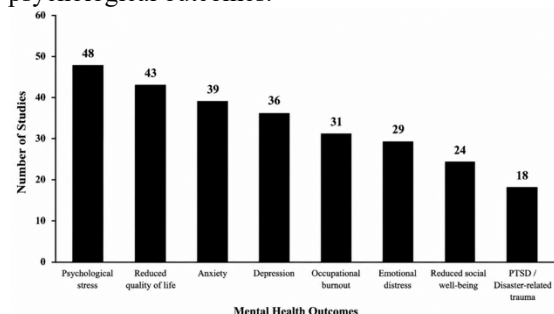


Figure 5. Major protective factors associated with improved psychological well-being among FSW identified across the included studies (N = 100)

4.8 Mental Health and the impacts of Climate Change and Coastal Disasters

Climate change has become one of the most important threats to the psychological well-being of FSW. The increased insecurity of livelihoods and emotional stress, uncertainty and social vulnerability have been caused by coastal erosion, sea-level rise,

cyclones, flooding, salinity intrusion, loss of fish resources and environmental degradation. Women are often affected disproportionately due to their caregiving roles, limited access to financial resources, and limited involvement in disaster decision-making processes [95].

Among women who were heads of households after war and natural disasters, depression, family stress and psychosocial problems were significantly higher, which shows the accumulation of many environmental and social factors [96]. Recent research has also highlighted the need for gender-sensitive public health policies targeting the needs of traditional FSW and climate change impacted coastal populations in particular [97]. Research based in Bangladesh also showed that women implement a variety of coping strategies, such as social networking, religious activities, livelihood diversification, and collective action, to help alleviate the psychological impact of environmental change, and that social and structural constraints remain. An intersectionality perspective also reveals that there are clear linkages between gender, occupation, class, ethnicity and access to social resources in FSH value chains with a strong impact on psychological well-being [99]. These findings taken together suggest that long-term psychological vulnerability of FSW can be reduced by incorporating mental health promotion, gender equality and livelihood resilience in climate adaptation policies.

4.9 Health Policies and Welfare Support Mechanisms

The reviewed literature consistently points to a need to implement integrated policies that address occupational health, gender equality, mental health, livelihood security and climate resilience. While the importance of women's role in FSH is increasingly recognized, the development of FSH policies in many countries still largely focuses on production and resource management, with little attention paid to psychosocial well-being or gender-responsive health care. Women are often not involved in the formal governance of FSH, occupational safety programmes, social insurance, or financial assistance and yet they play an important role in household economies [100].

This review concludes that enhancing psychological wellbeing should involve more than health care policy interventions. Gender-sensitive FSH governance, occupational health protection, accessible mental health services, financial inclusion, livelihood diversification, community-based resilience programmes and climate adaptation planning should be considered as effective strategies. Increased women's involvement in FSH decision-making, increased social protection schemes, encouragement of self-help groups, and embedding psychosocial support into coastal development programmes could have a significant

positive impact on long-term well-being. Additionally, a multidisciplinary approach involving public health practitioners, FSH regulators, social science experts, and policymakers is crucial to create sustainable interventions that can tackle the complex and interdependent occupational, environmental, and social factors influencing the mental well-being of FSW.

5. Discussion

This systematic literature review collates the evidence presented in published studies within 2000 to 2026, and it has been found that occupational, socioeconomic, environmental and gender-related factors play a complex inter-play in affecting the psychological well-being of FSW. Women's work in FSH is essential for harvesting, processing, marketing and household management, but their role and contribution is under-recognized in FSH governance and public health policies. The literature reviewed shows that psychological vulnerabilities of women in FSH are significantly influenced by occupational stress, livelihood insecurity, financial instability and unequal gender roles. Recent research has also revealed that the emotional distress and mental health issues facing coastal communities have been exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, coastal erosion, environmental degradation and repeated exposure to disasters, especially in low-resource areas [101, 102].

Social and economic inequities continue to be a significant factor in poor mental health, in addition to environmental stressors. Like in India for low income working women, FSW often have a combination of multiple roles, low financial autonomy, low access to health care, high work-family conflict leading to high psychological stress and low quality of life [103]. Failure of large scale FSH and environmental crises have also been linked to social disruption, unemployment and reduced community well-being, which suggests that mental health impacts can be long term beyond just the economic costs [104, 105]. Research on disaster-affected coastal communities also found that psychological resilience is highly dependent on family support, community solidarity, and recovery resources and that a strong social resilience should be developed prior to and following environmental disasters [106].

Another key conclusion from this review is that women are not only beneficiaries of FSH development programmes, but are also key agents for household and community well-being. Many studies showed that women's unpaid labor, care responsibilities, and involvement in community groups significantly contributes to the resilience of households, but these contributions are often not recognized in FSH management processes [107] and [108]. Recent evidence also shows that adaptive livelihood strategies, psychological resilience and women's empowerment have a significant positive

impact on overall well-being despite ongoing socioeconomic and environmental pressures [109,110]. However, the continued presence of disaster related trauma, especially for cyclone and coastal disaster, suggests that psychological support is not being adequately mainstreamed in disaster preparedness and recovery programmes [111].

The review also shows that local culture, community involvement and institutional support play a significant role in coping strategies. In times of environmental and economic uncertainty, women generally engage in livelihood diversification, collective action, self-help groups and social networking to mitigate psychological distress and adaptive capacity [112, 113]. But, occupational health services and psychosocial support have not yet been sufficiently covered by FSH policies despite the increasing awareness of the stressors that can impact fishing communities in the workplace [114,115]. Future interventions should therefore consider gender sensitive FSH governance, accessible mental health care, occupational safety programmes, climate adaptation planning and livelihood diversification, and should understand the intersectional vulnerabilities faced by women in the context of changing coastal environments [116, 117]. In general, the evidence available emphasizes the need for multidisciplinary and longitudinal studies, using standardized psychological assessment tools, to reinforce the implementation of evidence-based policies aimed at promoting the psychological well-being, resilience and social inclusion of FSW all over the world [118].

6. Conclusion

The results of this systematic literature review reveal that various occupational, socioeconomic, environmental and gender factors intertwine and influence the psychological wellbeing of FSW. The reviewed evidence clearly suggests that livelihood insecurity, poverty, occupational hazards, gender inequality, and climate change-related disasters play a significant role in psychological distress and poorer quality of life. Concurrently, resilience, family and community support, livelihood diversification, women's empowerment and effective coping strategies boost adaptive capacity and positive mental health outcomes. Despite the rise in research on the health and wellbeing of FSW in recent years, there are still key areas of knowledge that remain unfilled, such as standardised mental health assessment, longitudinal evidence and the effectiveness of intervention programmes. Thus, it is important to incorporate psychological well-being in FSH governance, occupational health services, disaster preparedness, and coastal development policies. Future multidisciplinary research needs to be done using gender responsive and community-based approaches to reinforce evidence-based interventions that will positively impact the mental health, social inclusion and sustainable livelihoods

of FSW, and the resilience of vulnerable coastal communities.

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