

3. Research findings: Shrimp

3.1. Shrimp farms

3.1.1. Profile of respondents

3.1.1.1. Farm owners

Six (6) shrimp farm owners in Sasmuan, Pampanga participated in the study. All owned and operated extensive farms. Some farms practiced monoculture of *P. monodon* or *P. vannamei*, but most farms practiced polyculture, with milkfish, crabs, and shrimp grown in the same compartment. Farm size ranged from 6 to 70 hectares, with 7.5 hectares as the median. The farms use traditional aquaculture methods with minimal mechanization, such as manual opening of the dike gate to facilitate water exchange between the fishpond and the adjoining river during high and low tides. They do not do any additional filtration of the water going in or out of the fishponds.

Extensive farm owners harvest the shrimps every three to four months, with a “typical” harvest around 350 to 2,100 kg (depending on the farm) with a “bad” harvest netting 80 to 240 kg. Farm owners found it difficult to cite an estimated “typical” harvest as the success of the harvest is highly unpredictable, likening it to gambling.

“Hindi mo ma-predict masyado. May time na maganda, may time na hindi maganda. Minsan, wala pang 10 per cent or 5 per cent. Alam mo sa prawn, maka-10 per cent ka lang, maganda na e. Halimbawa, naglagay ka ng 1 million fry. Pag nagka-100,000 ka, jackpot ka na. Ganun ka-risky.” (shrimp farm owner)

You can’t predict it. There are times it’s [the harvest] is good, there are times when it’s not good. Sometimes, it’s not even 10 or 5 per cent [survival rate]. With prawns, 10 per cent [survival rate] is already good. For example, you put in 1 million fry. If you get [harvest] 100,000, you hit the jackpot. It’s that risky.

“Kasi yung fishpond, parang sugal din. Mahirap din. Dun kasi, pag namatayan ka, minsan walang matitira. Malaki yung lugi.” (shrimp farm owner)

Owning a fishpond is like gambling. It’s hard. If they [the shrimp] die, sometimes none of them survive. The losses are large.

P. monodon is sold for export, while *P. vannamei* may be sold either locally or exported, depending on local farmgate prices. Shrimps for export are brought by the farm owners to *consignacions* (trading posts) in Hagonoy, Bulacan and Orani, Bataan, where traders purchase their shrimp and resell them to processor-exporters. The farm owners do not deal with the processor-exporters directly. The farm owners say that their shrimps are exported to Japan, China, Taiwan, and the US, but do not know anything about specific importers since they do not deal with them and do not consider them their concern.

No intensive shrimp farms were found in Sasmuan, Pampanga. Intensive shrimp farms in other regions were identified through data provided by DTI and by local partners. All of the companies contacted either declined or did not respond to requests to be interviewed for the study. Interviewed workers in Cebu described the intensive farms where they worked as highly mechanized, with paddles per compartment for aeration and an automatic feeder that could be set to release measured amounts of shrimp feed. The farms also have in-house laboratories for monitoring water quality.

The workers worked in intensive farms that raised *P. vannamei*. Stocking density per compartment may reach 80 to 150 shrimp per square meter of compartment, with total shrimps reaching 500,000 to 800,000 shrimps per compartment. This results in harvests ranging from seven metric tons (low) to 10 metric tons (good) to 12-15 metric tons (high). Typical survival rate for fry is 90 per cent. Shrimps are sold to buyers in Brgy. Pasil in Cebu City and Manila. Intensive farm workers were unaware of where the shrimp goes after it is sold to the buyers.

3.1.1.2. Farm workers

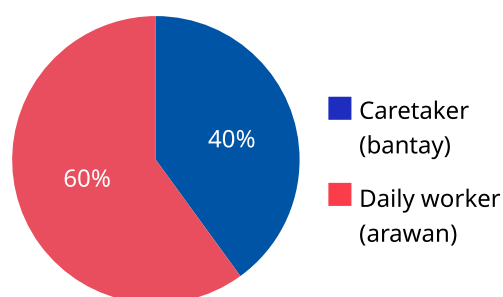
All shrimp farm workers interviewed in Sasmuan, Pampanga worked in extensive farms, most of which were polyculture farms that stocked milkfish, crabs, and shrimp in the same compartment. All shrimp farm workers interviewed in Cebu were workers from two different intensive farms that stocked shrimp and prawn, milkfish, and tilapia.

Extensive shrimp farm workers are either daily workers (arawan) (60 per cent) who are hired as needed or caretakers (bantay) (40 per cent) that are permanent full-time workers who live by the fishponds. They work in formal, registered fishponds but exhibit characteristics of informality. Many are drawn to extensive farms due to a lack of alternative job opportunities. Early involvement in aquaculture during adolescence is also common and may influence their continued participation in the sector. Additionally, transitions from related occupations occur; for example, small fishing boat operators or fishermen are often recruited to work in fishponds.

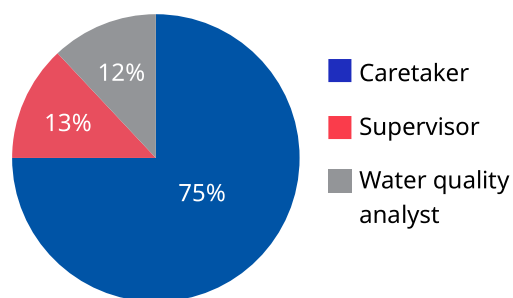
Meanwhile, 75 per cent of respondents from intensive shrimp farms work as permanent, full-time caretakers, primarily responsible for feeding the shrimp. They typically started their careers as maintenance, cleaning, or construction personnel before transitioning to caretaker positions. Additionally, many were referred by relatives already employed within the company.

All interviewed extensive farmers were male, with 72 per cent falling within the 50-59 and 30-49 age brackets, signifying a slowly aging workforce. Most interviewed intensive farmers were male, with most of them falling within the 30-49 age bracket.

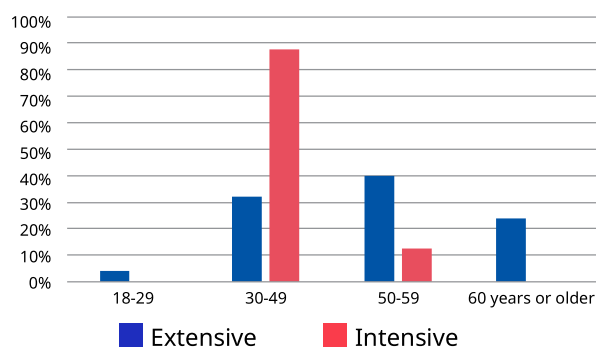
► **Figure 30. Roles among extensive farmers**



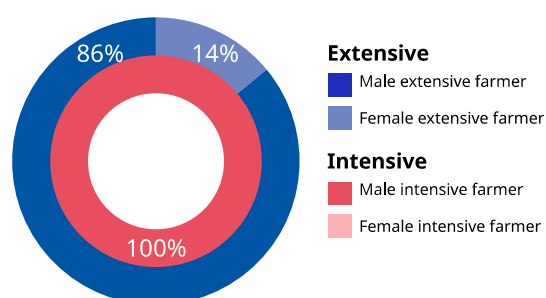
► **Figure 31. Roles among intensive farmers**



► **Figure 32. Average age of shrimp farmers**



► **Figure 33. Gender breakdown of shrimp farmers**



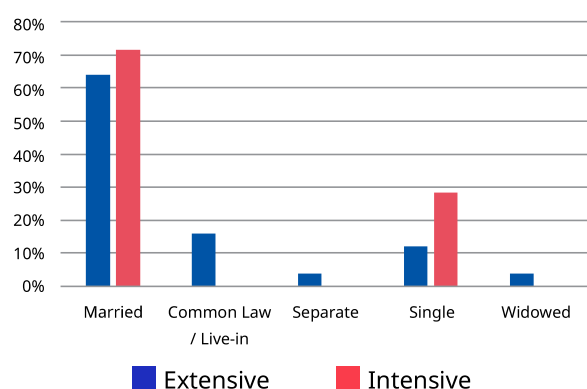
Most extensive and intensive shrimp farmers are married or have live-in/common law wives. Nearly all the extensive shrimp farm caretakers (90 per cent) are married or have live-in/common law wives, who live with them in caretaker huts adjacent to the fishponds. These women typically cook and clean for their caretaker husbands and are also paid wages. In contrast, the women in intensive farms work in the water quality testing laboratory.

Moreover, most extensive shrimp farmers (84 per cent) do not have any disabilities. None of the interviewed intensive shrimp farmers had disabilities. This can be attributed to their preference for hiring able-bodied workers due to the physically demanding nature of work at fishponds.

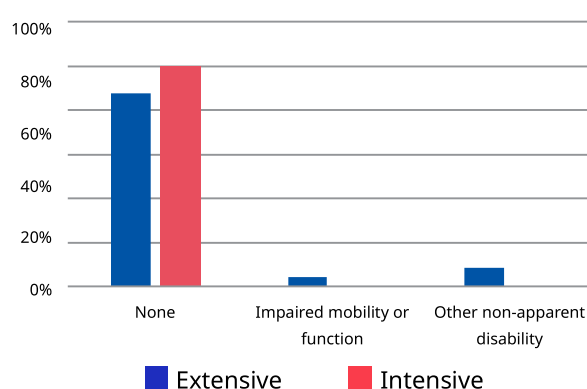
The average educational attainment of extensive shrimp farmers is at the elementary and high school levels. Among them, 60 per cent have attended or completed grade school and 36 per cent have attended or completed high school. Thus, minimal education is required to enter the sector.

In contrast, the average educational attainment of intensive shrimp farmers is higher, with 38 per cent of respondents having attended college. However, some college-educated respondents remain in caretaker roles because promotions to supervisory positions are unavailable until current supervisors vacate their roles.

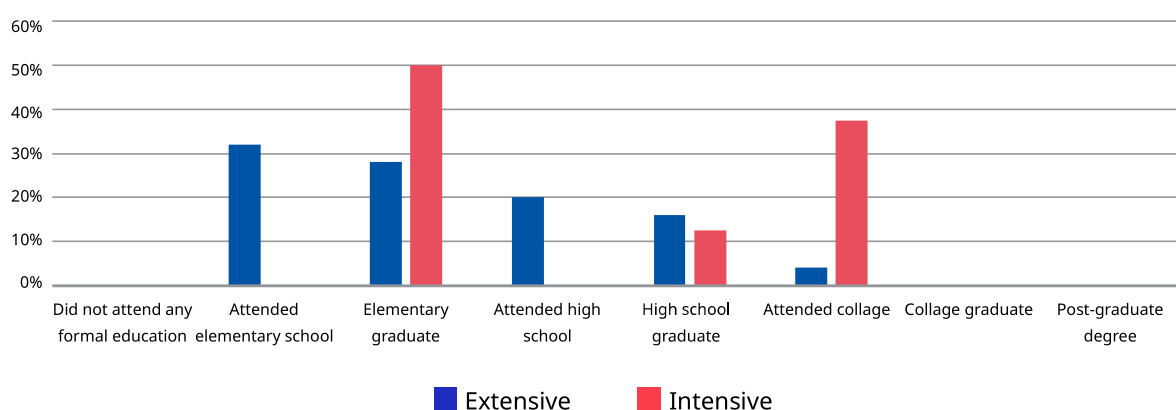
► Figure 34. Civil statuses of shrimp farm workers



► Figure 35. Disabilities among shrimp farmers



► Figure 36. Average educational attainment of shrimp farmers



The tasks of extensive shrimp farmers include stocking the fishpond with post-larvae shrimp (*paghulog*), the initial step in the shrimp farming process. As the shrimp grow, farmers feed them with commercial feeds or natural food gathered from the mangrove areas.

To maintain the fishponds, shrimp farmers are responsible for building and repairing earthen dikes (*pag-iistaka*), which involves reinforcing or patching them with materials such as mud, wood, and bamboo, and then placing fish nets around them. This is crucial to prevent water from overflowing during storms and to avoid harvest loss from spillover (*pitás*, refers to harvest loss due to external factors, thus includes stealing and spillovers).

Regular clearing of *Hydrilla verticillata* (digman) that grows on the fishpond floors is another important task, as this invasive plant can disrupt the pond environment. Additionally, farmers must cut grass and weeds grow around the fishponds.

Managing the fishpond gate (*prisa*) is a key task, as water exchange in the fishponds relies on the tides. Farmers open the gate during high tide to let clean water from the river flow in, and during low tide to let dirty water flow out, ensuring proper water exchange and quality.

Guarding (*pagbabantay*) and patrolling (*pagroronda*) the ponds are essential to protect the shrimp from theft. The caretakers guard the ponds at night starting from when the shrimp are two months old until the shrimp are ready for harvest. Then, the farming process culminates with the harvest of the shrimp. The harvest is sorted and the smaller fishes that remain in the pond are collected (*simot*). Additional daily workers are usually hired during harvest.

On the other hand, the tasks of the caretakers in the intensive farms include feeding the shrimp five times a day: 6 AM, 10 AM, 2 PM, 5 PM, and 10 PM. They monitor the feeding boxes to ensure the shrimp have eaten and transport sacks of feed as needed. Supervisors oversee the number of fry stocked in each pond and regulate the daily feed amounts.

Additionally, workers are responsible for monitoring and maintaining the fishponds and equipment, such as paddle wheel aerators and septic tanks, and cleaning their assigned ponds. Water quality analysts monitor the fishpond water for bacteria, plankton, and ammonia levels. They determine if treatments are needed, such as adding additional water or probiotics to counteract the presence of ammonia. The intensive farms also have assigned guards, but caretakers are also tasked to patrol at night.

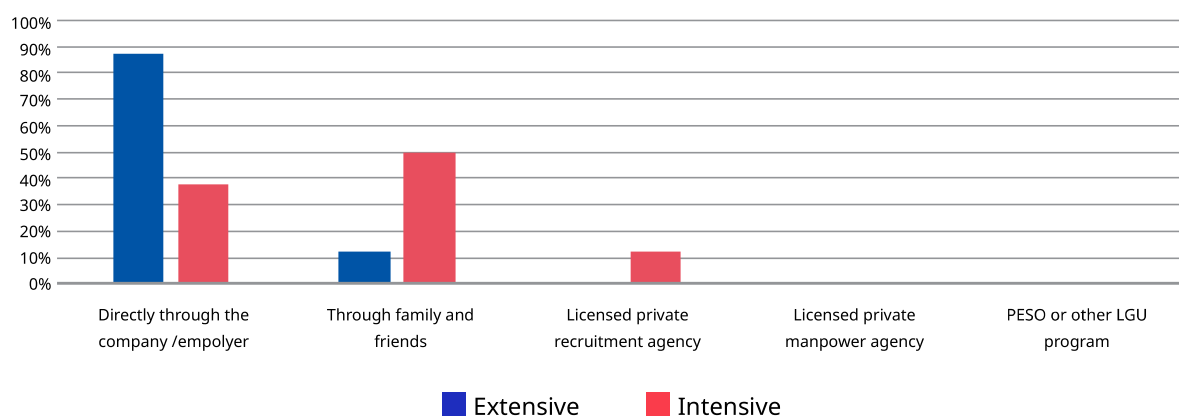
3.1.2. Employment creation

3.1.2.1. Recruitment practices

Both extensive and intensive shrimp farms have informal recruiting practices, relying heavily on trust in hiring family and friends or referrals from current workers. This potentially undermines fair recruitment practices, where workers without personal connections with the owners are less likely to be hired.

The majority (88 per cent) of extensive shrimp farmers are recruited directly by fishpond owners or their representatives, such as trusted caretakers (katiwala), who acts as recruiters. Caretakers sometimes ask a foreman to find daily workers in the barangay. Owners pay foremen a higher daily wage to cover the responsibilities of recruiting and managing daily workers. Daily workers often work for multiple fishpond owners at a time. The owners often prefer to recruit their relatives or friends, driven by trust in these relationships. A similar trend is found among intensive farm workers, with half of the respondents saying they were referred to the company by family or friends.

► **Figure 37. Recruitment channels among shrimp farmers**



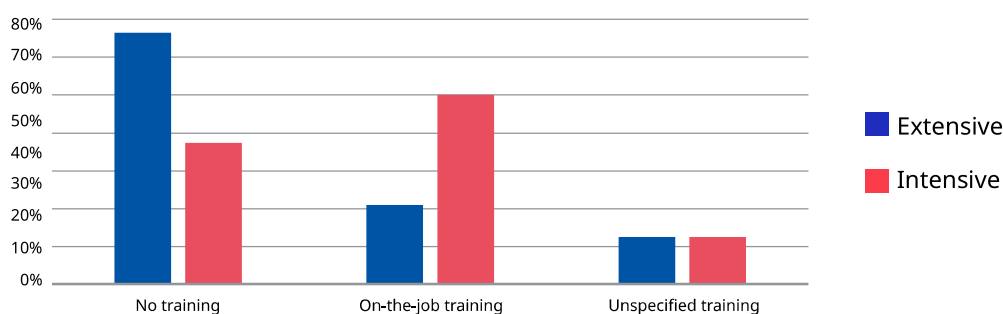
None of the shrimp farm workers (whether in extensive or intensive farms) were recruited via Public Employment Service Office (PESO) programme. The extensive shrimp farm owners interviewed also did not mention PESO as a way to find workers, as they preferred to hire family, friends, or referrals from current workers. This potentially undermines fair recruitment practices, where workers without personal connections with the owners are less likely to be hired.

This also indicates that the employment facilitation services of DOLE are not specific to aquaculture. The lack of PESO coverage in aquaculture also has implications for labour profiling in the sector. BLE's information on informal workers in aquaculture is limited to those who use PESO services, but since these workers do not typically use PESO, this results in a significant gap in labour profile data.

3.1.2.2. Skills development

There are limited training opportunities for workers in shrimp aquaculture, both due to access constraints and low demand, as few workers view training as necessary to their job or career.

► **Figure 38. Access to training among shrimp farmers**



Among extensive shrimp farmers, 68 per cent did not receive relevant training. Those that did were mostly trained on the job by shadowing more experienced workers. Fishpond owners also monitor fishponds with new workers more frequently. None of the workers were charged for the training. Notably, women in extensive farms do not receive any training. This is mainly because their roles predominantly involve maintaining the caretaker huts or cooking, and the training methods, such as shadowing experienced workers, are typically applicable only to shrimp farmers, who are predominantly men.

Interviewer: "May training ba para sa babae?"

Is there training for women?

Respondent: "Hindi po. Lalaki lang talaga. Yung babae, ang ginagawa lang nila pag nagha-harvest, nagluluto ng pagkain kasi libre yung pagkain sa mga arawan."

No. Just men only. The only thing women do during harvest is cook food for the daily workers because they're given free food.

A higher proportion (63 per cent) of workers in intensive farms have access to training, although this is also limited to on-the-job training only. Women are also trained. However, the training for women tends to be for less physically demanding tasks. For example, one female respondent working in the water quality monitoring laboratory described her tasks as "lighter" compared to the physical labour performed by male caretakers.

"Pero kung ang trabaho pwede raman sad sa babae – naay pwede sa babae naay pwede sa laki, pero ang training jud mostly jud lahi jud ang training sa laki jud kay bug-at man jud na ilaha compare sa amoa." (Intensive shrimp farm worker)

"If the job can be done by a woman – There are things that can be done by a woman, things that can be done by a man, but the training is really different. Their training is much heavier compared to ours." (Intensive shrimp farm worker)

This suggests that shrimp farm workers lack access to existing training interventions provided by the government, such as BFAR's training sessions covering good aquaculture practices, environment-friendly farming methods, and other pertinent topics. While these training sessions are typically conducted during inspections and disease surveillance of shrimp farms, extensive shrimp farms in Sasmuan are seldom visited, resulting in workers being deprived of these training opportunities.

Extensive shrimp farm workers also lack access to other government and industry-led skills development efforts. BFAR regularly partners with shrimp farm owners to address specific skill needs, providing training or technical assistance requested by owners. Owners are also encouraged to send workers to BFAR-conducted workshops and training sessions, as well as the biennial Philippine Shrimp Congress. Despite BFAR noting that extensive farms have also participated, none of the extensive farm workers in Sasmuan have attended these events. Only one intensive farm worker in Cebu (a water quality analyst) mentioned attending the Shrimp Congress.

None of the farmers reported attending TESDA Training Regulations in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery, such as the Aquaculture NC II and Seaweeds Production NC II.

Extensive shrimp farm owners report that workers generally show little interest in government training programs, believing they already possess the necessary knowledge. Owners share this sentiment, viewing training as essential only for new workers, while considering experienced ones to be adequately skilled.

“Kahit anong tawag namin, ayaw pumunta... “Ganito may pa-training ang BFAR na dapat gawin -- wala.” Wala silang interes. Kasi sasabihin sayo, “...marunong pa kami do’n.” Gano’n ang thinking.

Sa nature ng trabaho nila, fully knowledgeable sila. Hindi na kailangan ng pa-training do’n. Alam niyo ang skill training, dapat sa baguhan lang. [May puntong] ‘di na nila kailangan.” (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

“No matter how often we invite them, they don’t want to come... [If you say to them] “Here, BFAR will train us on how we should do things” – nothing. They are not interested. They will tell you, “We know better than them.” That’s how they think.

“Given the nature of their work, they’re already fully knowledgeable. They don’t need more training. You know, skills training should only be for the new workers. At some point, you don’t need it anymore.” (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

However, owners did acknowledge the need for further skills development specifically for caretakers. This training is typically provided by the owners themselves, who pass on their own expertise and insights gained from BFAR’s training programs.

“Ang pinaka-main worker ko, yung pinaka-bantay ko, ‘yan ang nangangailangan ng training – technically, pagpapalaki. Na-iimpart naman namin ang dapat nilang gawin when it comes to culturing. Kung ano man yung nalalaman namin o binibigay na information ng BFAR ay inaapply sa kanila.” (Shrimp Farm Owners Association of Sasmuan)

“My main worker, my caretaker, that’s who needs training. We impart to them what they should do when it comes to culturing. They apply what we know and what information we’ve received from BFAR.” (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

Improving access to skills development among extensive shrimp farms is imperative for the industry. Training on updated shrimp production technology has been identified by BFAR as a critical skill requirement for the future of the industry. Government stakeholders have also identified gaps in entrepreneurial skills and a shortage of workers with the necessary experience and expertise to fulfil the role of fishpond caretakers.

Current government-led efforts to address these gaps include the establishment of a TESDA-accredited “shrimp school” aimed at training shrimp farm workers. Through their Gender and Development (GAD) programme, BFAR ensures equal access to pre-production and production training for both men and women, empowering women to contribute effectively across all stages of the supply chain. Furthermore, BFAR aims to implement a ladderized certification programme wherein each “ladder” or level of compliance provides specific government benefits and incentives, including training programs.

Government stakeholders have also recognized the necessity for international assistance in skills development, particularly in integrating new technologies and implementing best practices.

Unions have acknowledged ongoing efforts to extend training initiatives to informal workers in the sector. However, they emphasize the necessity for a more centralized approach and coordinated governmental efforts. A comprehensive training needs analysis is deemed essential to accurately respond to the sector's skills requirements.

"Sa informal, maraming trainings na ginagawa ng DA. Ang problema nga, hindi organized... Dapat may analysis yan... Hindi yun ibibigay lang ng DA, DTI, kasi ito ang project nila, yung iba doon hindi naman talaga needs, it does not respond to the actual needs... Kaya ang proposal ko talaga is come up with a joined or integrated analysis ng gobyerno based on the people's testimonies and consultations bago mag-come up ng project, ng intervention." (Labour group)

"In the informal sector, DA has many trainings. The problem is it is not organized. There needs to be an analysis... DA, DTI, can't just give training sessions because that's the project they have, some of those don't really respond to actual needs... That's why my proposal is to come up with a joined or integrated analysis of the government based on people's testimonies and consultations before they come up with projects and interventions." (Labour group)

3.1.2.3. Termination practices

Reasons for termination conform with prevailing rules on termination, but there are no formal termination procedures. Workers do not have any concerns at present due to perceived fairness, but this may become an issue in the future should workers' circumstances change.

Instances of employee termination reported by interviewees were all for just causes consistent with national rules and procedures outlined in Article 297 of the Labor Code. These included behavioural issues, theft, intoxication at the workplace, and failing a drug test – all of which are valid grounds for termination as specified in Article 297 and Department Order 147-15.

None of the interviewees expressed concerns about the reasons for these terminations, stating that they believed the actions taken by employers were fair:

"For me, it's really okay as long as there is a basis for them to remove themselves because I can also see the situation myself, it's really necessary because there are many of us." (Intensive shrimp farm worker)

While there is some semblance of termination procedures described by extensive fishpond owners, such as confronting workers and giving them an opportunity to explain themselves, and workers themselves cite no issues with termination procedures, there is no evidence that formal notices of intent to dismiss or other official termination procedures outlined by DOLE-BLR are followed.

"[During instances of termination] Kausapin namin. 'O, nakita kitang ganyan. May nakakita.' Pero syempre, pag sinasabi lang, hindi ka muna maniniwala. Syempre baka sinisiraan lang yung tao, ganun. Syempre iba pa rin kung ikaw yung actual na nakakita. [When confronted] sasabihin nila 'Kung ganun, aalis nalang ako.' Ganun yung normal na nangyayari." (Shrimp farm owner in Sasmuan)

"[During instances of termination] We'll talk to them, like 'hey, we saw you or someone saw you do something.' But if it's hearsay, you shouldn't believe it right away. Someone might be trying to ruin their reputation. But it's different if you actually witnessed it. [When confronted,] they'll tell you, 'If that's the case, I'll just leave.' That's what normally happens." (Shrimp farm owner in Sasmuan)

On the other hand, workers in intensive farms described termination procedures that begin with verbal warnings. After the third verbal warning, they are made to sign an agreement stating that if the incident occurs a fourth time, the employer can dismiss them.

“Warning-an sa verbal pa lang na, mao lang gihapon verbal palang gihapon. Pagka-ikatulo ana kanang, wala na gipang-warning nana. Sila ug kanang pirma mao na igka-upat mao nana.” (intensive shrimp farm worker)

“It’s a verbal warning at first. After the third time, there’s no more warning. They will sign [an agreement] that on the fourth time, it’s when [they are terminated].”

3.1.2.4. Insecurity and non-standard forms of employment

Workers in extensive shrimp farms experience a lack of job security and non-standard employment arrangements, such as on-call work and multiple employer engagements. yet many perceive this flexibility as preferable.

Workers in extensive shrimp farms face a notable lack of security of tenure, as they can be dismissed from work at any time (“fire at will”). The working arrangements for daily workers in these farms are typically characterized as being on-call, with workers called as needed, without the assurance of stable employment. As a result, they often work for multiple employers simultaneously. However, many daily workers perceive this arrangement as preferable, as it allows them the flexibility to switch owners who offer more favorable working conditions (“quit at will”).

“Kunwari may fishpond ka, may fishpond ako. Kung ayaw mo magtrabaho sa akin, puwede ka lumipat sa iba.” (Sasmuan shrimp farmer)

“For example, you have a fishpond and I have a fishpond. If you don’t want to work for me anymore, you can just transfer to a different one [fishpond].” (Sasmuan shrimp farmer)

In comparison, workers in intensive farms have more security of tenure as workers are not dismissed immediately. Workers described termination procedures, which include receiving verbal warnings first, then signing an agreement that if the incident happens a fourth time, then the employer can dismiss them.

3.1.2.5. Emerging environment and technological issues

Disease, climate change (specifically increasing intensity and frequency of typhoons), and poor water quality are emerging issues. Extensive farms lack the resources for further mechanization or new technology, while intensive farms are unlikely to be fully automated.

White spot disease remains a significant problem in the shrimp aquaculture industry. While owners of intensive and semi-intensive farms have implemented various biosecurity measures, the disease is more common in extensive farms. This not only affects the number of workers needed for harvesting but also impacts their bonus and variable income.

“Ang pinakaproblema namin yung presence ng mga sakit ng inaalagan namin. Nabanggit ko yung White Spot Syndrome ng prawn – although marami ng pa-training sa amin yung BFAR, wala pang direct na gamot na makakacure. Pagtinamaan ‘yon lahat yan [maapektuhan] (yung buong pitong hektarya). Walang matitira.” (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

“Our main problem is the presence of sickness in the shrimp we cultivate. I mentioned White Spot Syndrome in prawn – although BFAR has many trainings for us, there’s no medicine that can directly cure it. If you get hit [by the disease], everything is affected (all seven hectares). Nothing is left.” (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

In response, BFAR FPED conducts disease surveillance and monitoring throughout the country, with some regions having access to conventional polymerase chain reactions (PCR) to detect white spot disease. They also provide free water quality, bacteriology, and microbiology testing during routine farm visits. BFAR FPED requirements for farm registration and accreditation also include compliance with international standards on biosecurity. Farms that cannot comply are monitored through farm visitation and disease detection surveillance to improve their capacity for compliance. However, these initiatives mostly cover intensive and semi-intensive

farms. The Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association received training from BFAR on disease prevention, but also noted that it is insufficient.

Climate change is another pressing issue, with more frequent and intense typhoons causing damage to ponds and rising water levels, resulting in lost harvests. Extensive farms build up the dikes or place nets to protect the ponds and prevent spillover. Additionally, OSHC noted that the increasing heat index poses OSH challenges for fishpond workers who are constantly outdoors.

"Calamity talaga. Prone kami sa calamity. Kaya makikita mo yung taas na yan [pilapil], last na typhoon, nag-overflow yan. Ganun ka-grabe, calamity. Kasi in my own experience, every year, tumataas yung level ng tubig." (Extensive shrimp farm owner)

"It's really calamities. We're prone to calamities. You can see how high the dikes are now, but during the last typhoon, it [still] overflowed. That's how extreme [the] calamities [are]. In my own experience, every year, the water level rises." (Extensive shrimp farm owner)

Poor water quality is another significant issue in extensive fish farms. Fishpond owners and workers in Sasmuan, Pampanga report that water quality has deteriorated due to the increasing use of artificial feeds for milkfish in intensive milkfish farms. Additionally, the 1991 eruption of Mt. Pinatubo obstructed river water flow, further degrading water quality.

"So before, walang ganun dito. Puro natural foods lang kami. Meron kaming pinapakain na shells galing sa dagat. At yung natural food na sinasabi naming – nagpapatubo kami ng lumot, ganun. Wala syang chemical. Kaya ang worry ko... magre-retire na ako sa fishpond. Kasi I'm expecting that it's getting worse." (Extensive shrimp farm owner)

"So before, it wasn't like that here. We only use natural foods. We feed them shells from the sea. The natural foods I talked about – we would grow algae. No chemicals. That's my worry... I'll retire from fishponds soon. Because I'm expecting that it's getting worse." (Extensive shrimp farm owner)

"Isa lang naman ang running water natin. E nung nagkaron ng Pinatubo, bumabaon dyan. Hindi na gaanong sumacycle yung tubig. Kaya nga mababaw dyan e. Dati ganda ng business dito, hindi katulad ngayon." (Extensive shrimp farm owner)

"We only have one [source] of running water. When Pinatubo happened, that area was buried. The water doesn't cycle as much. That's why it's shallow there. Business used to be good here, not like now." (Extensive shrimp farm owner)

Because of these challenges, extensive fishpond farmers and owner struggle to maintain healthy shrimp populations and ensure sustainable farming practices in extensive farms. They noted the decreasing shrimp survival rates, which has led to many polyculture farms focusing on milkfish instead of shrimp.

"Oo, nung walang Pinatubo, 40 per cent [of the shrimp survive]. Kaya yung mga [shrimp farm] dito noon, big time... At ang prawn kasi, mas madali ang system. Hindi maraming manpower. Hindi kagaya ng isda, bulky. Imagine a. Magkano ang per kg ng bangus? Ngayon PhP 110, PhP 120. E samantalang pag nag-sugpo ka, pinakamababa is 300 to 1,000 [pesos] per kg. See the difference? Kaya lang, wala kang choice dahil yun ngayon yung demand. Kasi wala ka nang makuha magandang sugpo. Kasi pag ganyan ang kulay ng tubig, hindi ka makakabuhay ng sugpo." (Extensive shrimp farm owner)

"Yes, before Pinatubo, 40 per cent [of the shrimp survive]. That's why the shrimp farms here before were big time [rich]. Because prawn is an easier system. Not a lot of manpower. Unlike fish that's bulky. Imagine – how much is a kg of milkfish? Nowadays it's PhP 110 (1.88 USD⁶), PhP 120 (2.05 USD). But if you grow shrimp, the lowest is PhP 300 to PhP 1,000 (5.13-17.11 USD) per kg. See the difference? But we have no choice now because that's the demand now. Because we can't grow good quality shrimp anymore. Because that's the colour of the water, you can't keep shrimp alive. (Extensive shrimp farm owner)

Mechanization in extensive farms in Sasmuan is limited, and farm owners in Sasmuan lack the resources to introduce technology in fishponds, such as filters. Meanwhile, automation in intensive fish farms is only partial, as caretakers noted that feeding machines still need to be monitored.

3.1.3. Standards and rights at work

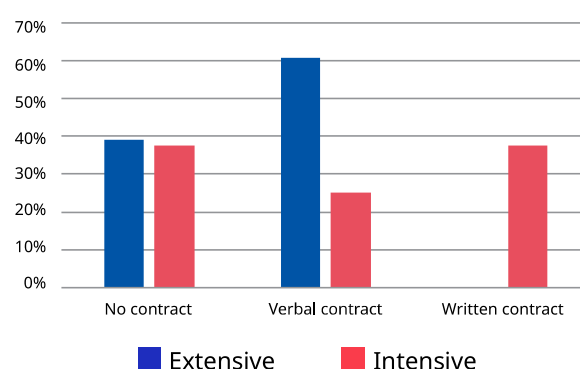
3.1.3.1. Contracts and employment arrangements

None of the extensive farm workers have written contracts. Only some intensive shrimp farm workers have written contracts, despite reporting that they are considered regular employees. The lack of written contracts makes possible disputes more difficult for the workers.

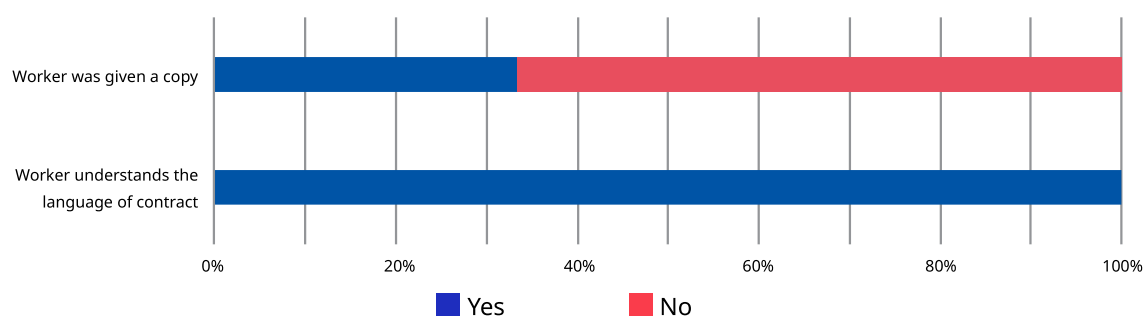
None of the extensive farm workers have formal written contracts. Fifty-eight percent (58 per cent) have verbal contracts (*usapan*) with the fishpond owners, while 42 per cent did not have any contracts at all. The details of these verbal contracts, such as whether a wage was agreed upon or what employment arrangements were discussed, were not confirmed. While verbal contracts are legally binding in the Labor Code of the Philippines, these are more prone to ambiguities and disputes than formal written contracts.

A higher proportion of workers in intensive farms have written contracts (38 per cent). Among those with written contracts, all reported that the contracts were in a language they could understand (either English or the local language) and 33 per cent were given a copy of the contract. Additionally, 24 per cent have verbal contracts only.

► Figure 39. Contracts among shrimp farmers

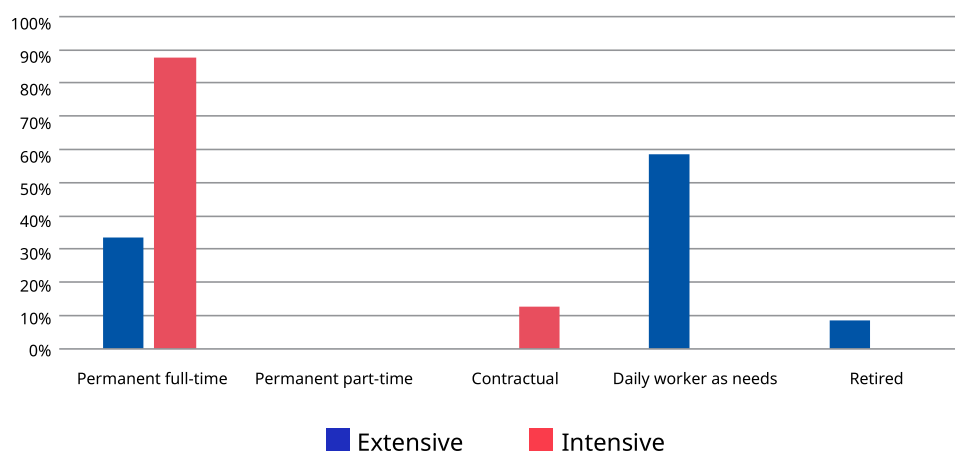


► Figure 40. Details of contracts among intensive shrimp farmers



Moreover, 38 per cent of intensive farmers do not have contracts at all, despite 88 per cent of workers saying they are permanent, full-time employees. Interviewees recounted starting as contractual workers and eventually being regularized. However, despite their regularization and being asked for documentary requirements, they did not sign any formal contracts.

► Figure 41. Employment status of shrimp farmers



Some intensive farm workers feel that they are unable to negotiate employment terms and just comply with whatever is stipulated, expressing relief at simply having a salary.

Interviewer: Igo ra mo ning pirma niya basa?

You just read and signed?

Respondent: Basa me sa pamatakaran nila murag koan siyempre excited man sad ka siyempre trabaho kay mo [incomprehensible] to siya. Ang ako trabaho ra man importanti nga naa tay sweldo. Ana mao ra man gyud na atoa man naa tay sweldo. Unsay ilang mga rules igo ra man ta mo-follow ana nalang.

I read their rules and of course I'm excited because of course I have a job now because it is going to be [incomprehensible]. For me, work is more important because I have a salary. That is what's important, that we have a salary. Whatever their rules, I will just follow."

3.1.3.2. Working time

Extensive shrimp farm caretakers work actively from morning until noon, viewing afternoon hours as passive monitoring, which results in no overtime pay. This practice conflicts with the Philippine Labor Code, which mandates that all hours at the prescribed workplace count as work. Daily shrimp farm workers receive overtime pay for extended hours during harvest.

Intensive shrimp farmers work "broken shifts" and employers do not count the "resting hours" in between as working hours. However, the quality of rest that workers are getting is questionable.

Extensive shrimp farm caretakers typically work actively from 6:00 AM or 7:00 AM until 12:00 noon. Although they remain at the fishpond in the afternoon, they perceive this time as passive monitoring rather than working hours. Near harvest time, they also patrol at night to prevent theft. Since they do not consider their presence at the fishpond past 12:00 noon as overtime, they do not receive overtime pay.

However, according to the Philippine Labor Code, all hours spent at the fishpond should be considered work rendered. The Labor Code states that "hours worked shall include (a) all time during which an employee is required to be on duty or to be at a prescribed workplace; and (b) all time during which an employee is suffered or permitted to work."

While the Labor Code excludes "rest periods of short duration during working hours" from work rendered, it is unclear if the caretakers' situation complies with this provision. After 12:00 noon, they remain at their prescribed workplace and may need to respond to emergencies, but they are also often resting.

Daily shrimp farm workers generally work from 6:00 AM or 7:00 AM until 12:00 noon. During harvest, their hours can extend until 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM, which they consider as overtime hours. They are paid an additional PhP 300 - 400 (5.13-6.85 USD) for overtime hours.

Typical working hours for intensive shrimp farm caretakers are from 6:00 AM to 11:00 PM, under a “broken time” working arrangement. They feed the shrimp five times a day: 6:00 AM, 10:00 AM, 2:00 PM, 5:00 PM, and 10:00 PM. If they have no other tasks, they can return home to rest and come back at the next feeding time. However, while these are “off-duty hours”, the quality of rest that workers get is questionable as the longest continuous off-duty period is only six hours (from 11:00 PM to 5:00 AM the next day).

“Unya, di ka katug og tarong kay maglawog pa baya ka alas 6, alas 10, alas 2 sa hapon, alas 5 sa hapon, unya balik na pod, alas 10 sa gabii. Naa mi ilawog alas 10 sa gabii.” (intensive shrimp farm worker)

“Then, you can't sleep well because you have to do the feeding at 6:00 [AM], 10:00 [AM], 2 o'clock in the afternoon, 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and then come again at 10 o'clock in the evening. We still have feeding to do at 10 o'clock in the evening.”

Workers also lose resting time due to the constant travel between their residence and workplace. They can also be called back at any time, if needed. During harvest, the working hours for intensive shrimp farm workers can extend from 7:00 PM to 5:00 AM, or from 5:00 AM throughout the morning.

“Broken time pero dako kay nang lapas sa among koan oy. Mga harvest me abtan mig alas-2 sa kadlawn unya napa gyud me duty gabie. Ma-brownoutan me og alas-2 sa kadlawn unsa orasa way limit unsang oras. Amoa nang risiko kay pagbalik didto kay kana bitaw box sa kada usa switch. Ma-on gyud na siya nimo individual.” (intensive shrimp farm worker)

“Broken time but there are large amounts [of overtime]. When we harvest, we reach until 2 o'clock in the morning and then we also have night duty. If there's a brownout at 2:00 AM, there's no limit to our [working] hours. That's our risk because when we get back here [to the farm], there is a box for every switch. You turn them on individually.”

Sundays are their designated day off. However, caretakers are still required to go to work and feed the shrimp. This results in the caretakers not having any rest days.

“Sa production sir, kami way holiday way Sabado og Domingo. Way holiday automatic siyempre. Pagkaon anang buhi wa mana siya pahuway kay og ato ma-miss feed ma apektohan sad among koan mo trabaho per day.” (intensive shrimp farm worker)

“In the production sir, we don't have holidays, Saturdays, or Sundays. No holidays, of course that's automatic. Feeding and keeping [the shrimp] alive doesn't stop because missed feeding will affect our work per day.”

3.1.3.3. Wages

Wages fluctuate with harvest yields, and during poor harvest periods, the lowest wages fall below the region-specific minimum wage for agricultural workers. Intensive shrimp farm workers do not receive any additional pay, despite working more than eight (8) hours a day and on their rest day. These reveal a deficit in decent work standards. Shrimp farmers have additional sources of income, indicating underemployment and insufficient earnings to meet basic needs.

Extensive shrimp farm caretakers receive a monthly wage ranging from PhP 8,000 to PhP 10,000 (136.92-171.14 USD), supplemented by a 10 per cent share of the net income per harvest [every three months]. Wages are highly dependent on the harvest incentive provided. Without this incentive, their earnings fall below the regional minimum wage of PhP 454 to PhP 470 (7.77-8.04 USD) per day or PhP 13,620 to PhP 14,000 (233.10-239.60 USD) per month. Despite this, workers accept these conditions due to the potential for substantial incentives during prosperous harvests. The incentive also serves as a deterrent against stealing from the fishpond. This wage structure presents a semblance of formality due to the fixed wage and incentive scheme, yet workers do not receive accompanying benefits (see Section 3.4, Wage-related benefits).

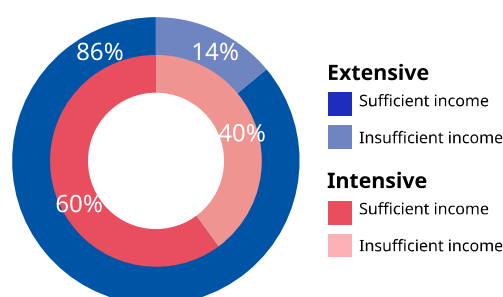
Meanwhile, daily shrimp farm workers for extensive farms are paid PhP 300 (5.13 USD) for a half-day's work, which can increase to PhP 600 to 700 (10.27-11.98 USD) for whole day (e.g., during harvest time). However, this compensation falls below the region-specific minimum wage for agricultural workers of PhP 454 to PhP 470 (7.77-8.04 USD) per day for eight hours of work.

Intensive shrimp farm workers receive a monthly wage ranging from PhP 5,000 to PhP 9,999 (85.57-171.13 USD). Supervisors and water quality analysts earn higher wages, with supervisors earning between PhP 20,000 and PhP 24,999 (342.29-427.85 USD), and water quality analysts earning between PhP 15,000 and PhP 19,999 (256.72-342.27 USD). Their wages meet the region-specific minimum wage for agriculture workers of PhP 415-458 (7.10-7.84 USD) per day. Some workers said that they were also supposed to receive cash incentives based on the success of the harvest but that they have not received any, despite their repeated follow-ups and promises by management.

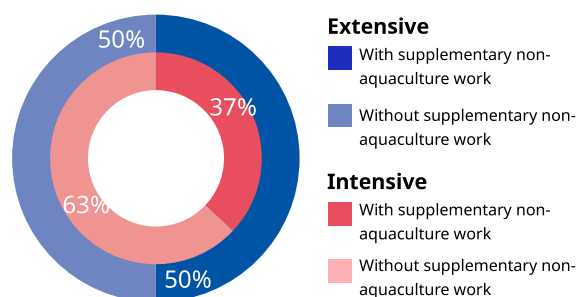
"Mao na amo yangongo karon sir, dugay na. Kay nag paghatag sa report kay mao na amo gikuan karon ang incentives, wala pa gihatag. Naa mi ginancya ingon ana pero wala pa nahatag ba kay ang report wala pa mahuman. Dugay na kaayo na. Muingon ra nga maghuwat ra." (intensive shrimp farm worker)

"That's what we've been following up, sir, because it's taking so long. They gave a report but the incentives haven't been given. We have it [the incentive] but it hasn't been given yet because the report is unfinished. It's been so long. They said 'Just wait

► **Figure 42. Sufficiency of income of shrimp farmers**



► **Figure 43. Shrimp farmers with supplemental work**



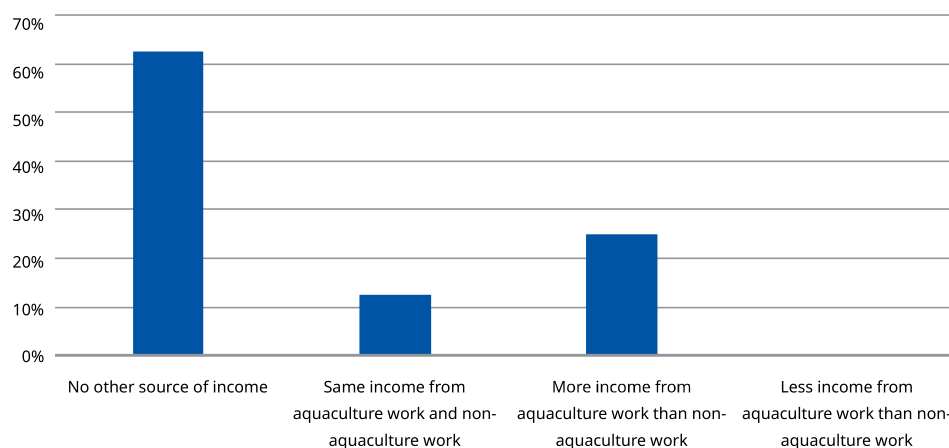
The monthly wage of caretakers in intensive shrimp farms is based on the local minimum daily wage (Php 415 or 7.10 USD in Cebu) multiplied by 26 working days per month, for a gross monthly salary of Php 10,790 (184.67 USD). This gross salary assumes that they do not work on their day off (typically Sunday). However, caretakers must still work on Sundays but are unpaid. They are also not paid any overtime pay or night differential for their “broken time” shift, despite ending around 11:00 PM on regular days or at around 5:00 AM the next day during harvest days.

While 60 per cent of extensive shrimp farmers expressed satisfaction with their income, 37 per cent sought supplementary sources of income through non-aquaculture jobs like construction work and open-sea fishing. Those with supplementary sources of income are typically daily workers who engage in fishpond work in the morning and other jobs in their free time. It is more difficult for caretakers to take on additional work, as they cannot leave the fishponds without the owners’ permission. A similar trend was found in intensive farms, with 86 per cent expressing that they have sufficient income, but with 50 per cent taking supplementary work such as raising livestock, providing motorcycle taxi services, and selling snacks and groceries.

This need for additional income streams suggests that earnings from shrimp farming alone are inadequate. Moreover, their willingness and availability to work additional hours despite being fully employed indicates time-related or invisible underemployment. This suggests primary occupation as shrimp farmers does not fully utilize their work capacity.

Among the extensive shrimp farmers who engage in supplementary non-aquaculture work, the majority earn more income from their shrimp farming than from their additional jobs. Shrimp farming remains their primary source of income.

► **Figure 44. Comparison of aquaculture income and supplementary non-aquaculture income**



3.1.3.4. Wage-related benefits

Despite being employed by formal enterprises, both extensive and intensive shrimp farm workers have limited access to mandatory benefits such as overtime pay and paid leaves. They also have limited access to health insurance. This is a deficit in decent work standards.

Access to the minimum statutory monetary benefits mandated by the DOLE and other benefits for both extensive and intensive shrimp farm workers is generally low. Although they should be entitled to these as workers in formal enterprises, most extensive shrimp farmers commented that such benefits are uncommon among them (*"hindi uso dito"*). Most interviewees were not even aware of all these benefits, such as separation pay or premium pay. Intensive shrimp farm workers have slightly better access as they receive 13th month pay, but do not receive holiday, premium, overtime, or night differential pay.

Among extensive shrimp farmers, only daily workers who extend their shifts beyond the usual 6:00 AM to 12:00 NN schedule receive overtime pay. Caretakers stay on the property after their morning active hours to monitor the ponds, but both caretakers and owners do not consider this time as working hours and so the caretakers do not receive overtime pay.

The complexity increases with the broken shifts and lack of fixed hours for intensive farmers. Because extensive farm caretakers do not regard inactive time as working hours and due to the irregular schedules of intensive farmers, it is challenging to determine eligibility for benefits such as overtime pay and night shift differentials.

Additionally, one respondent from an intensive farm reported that she did not claim maternity leave because she was unaware of her eligibility. It was only later that the company informed her that she could have claimed this benefit.

"Ay kinsa may nagdahom diay nga wala pa lage to nagkuan kanang knowledge ganon pwede diay mu-claim atong maternity [benefit]. Nakadungog naku ana nga mu-apply kog maternity bi kay sayang kaayo ingon akong uyoan nga aynalang oy mao raman gihapon. Nagmahay gani ko nganong wala to naku gi-claim. Silang opisina ato niingon nga pwede jud to nimo e-claim kay imoha to." (Intensive shrimp farm worker)

"Who would have thought that I hadn't even received that knowledge that we can actually claim our maternity benefits. I heard that if I apply for maternity benefits, it would be a waste, as I had intended to do it later. I regret why I didn't claim it in their office. They said 'You could have claimed it because it's yours'" (Intensive shrimp farm worker).

► **Table 15. Access to benefits among shrimp farmers**

Minimum government-mandated benefits	Extensive shrimp farmers with access	Intensive shrimp farmers with access
Holiday pay	16%	38%
Premium pay	46%	0%
Overtime pay	26%	0%
Night shift differential	26%	0%
13th month pay	14%	75%
Separation pay	8%	25%
Retirement pay	8%	25%
Service incentive leave	8%	13%
Maternity leave	N/A to any of the interviewees	100% (only one female respondent)
Paternity leave	33%	14%

Parental leave	N/A to any of the interviewees	N/A to any of the interviewees
Leave for victims of violence against women and their children (VAWC)	N/A to any of the interviewees	0%
Special leave for women	N/A to any of the interviewees	0%
Other benefits	Extensive shrimp farmers with access	Intensive shrimp farmers with access
Health insurance	0%	13%
Life insurance	0%	0%
Accident insurance	0%	0%
Bonuses and other performance incentives	50%	13%
Annual leave (more than 5 days)	8%	25%
Sick leave	17%	38%

Additionally, some extensive fishpond owners extend cash advances in case of work-related injury or sickness by allowing workers to receive wages in advance (bale) to cover medical expenses. The cash advance will be deducted from the farmers' future wages. Some provide additional funds as Christmas or birthday gifts, but this is at their discretion and is not guaranteed.

3.1.3.5. Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

OSH procedures in extensive shrimp farms are ad hoc, resulting from minimal understanding of OSH and the general absence of a culture of safety. Intensive shrimp farms have better OSH practices compared to extensive farms, but these still need to be improved.

Although DOLE-BWC does not have OSH standards specific to aquaculture besides the general OSH standards, many extensive shrimp farm workers confirmed that the fishpond owners have established their own safety measures against hazards and risks. It is unclear whether these measures are written or verbal. These safety training procedures and policies are presumed to be ad hoc and not formally verified or standardized. This lack of formalization suggests that the implementation and effectiveness of these safety measures may vary significantly across different fishponds.

Despite the safety measures, the majority of extensive shrimp farm interviewees have experienced work-related injuries. Common injuries and accidents experienced by male workers include cuts, fevers, body aches, and slipping or falling. Meanwhile, common injuries experienced by women are burns from cooking meals and physical exhaustion, though the interviewees noted that this is rare. The usual response to these injuries were self-treatment at home or seeking medical attention at the hospital.

In comparison, all interviewed intensive shrimp farmers confirmed that their employers have OSH policies and procedures. However, it was not clarified whether these policies and procedures are written or verbal. The female respondent working in the water testing laboratory reported no injuries at work.

Interviewees considered the term "accident" to cover only incidents resulting in major bodily harm or death. Cuts and bruises from equipment (e.g., knives) or environmental hazards (e.g., sharp rocks in the fishpond mud) were seen as normal and not classified as "accidents". This contrasts sharply with DOLE's general OSH standards, which include any unplanned or unexpected work-related occurrence, regardless of severity.

While workers view minor injuries as routine, OSH standards still consider them as "work injuries". This discrepancy highlights a significant gap in the workers' understanding and recognition of workplace hazards and the protections afforded by law.

Most extensive farmers reported they were oriented on their workplace, the proper use of equipment and facilities, and safety protocols while working. However, while the majority reported that they were oriented on the “proper handling” of hazardous chemicals and access to “appropriate” PPEs, qualitative interview data suggests that this proper handling is not followed in actual practice. Although most also reported working with PPE, actual equipment used varied from helmets and gloves to cloth coverings for their nose and mouth, overturned baskets for head protection, and plastic bags on their hands.

Extensive shrimp farm workers handle chemicals meant to kill the small fish remaining in the pond by covering their hands with plastic bags and covering their nose and mouth with cloth shirts and consider these to be sufficient protection. One interviewee recounted an incident where a worker died after handling the chemical with their bare hands and then smoked a cigarette after, ingesting the poison by accident. Despite this, the interviewee admitted to using his bare hands when handling the same chemical. While this account raises concerns about inadequate protection and insufficient orientation on chemical handling, further investigation would be needed to assess the relevance and impact of such practices across shrimp farms.

Half of the extensive workers reported that their environment was free from hazardous chemicals. However, many later mentioned the use of “sodium”. While the specific chemical was not identified by the respondents, they may be referring to sodium hypochlorite (used as a disinfectant to prepare fishponds) and/or sodium thiosulfate (used as a neutralizer and chelator) (Cruz-Lacierda and de la Peña n.d.). Sodium hypochlorite (NaOCl) can cause skin and eye irritation, respiratory issues, chemical burns, and respiratory distress, while sodium thiosulfate (Na₂S₂O₃) can cause skin and eye irritation and gastrointestinal disturbances. The fact that workers do not immediately recognize these substances as dangerous indicates that their OSH training is inadequate.

Furthermore, the association of shrimp farm owners in Sasmuan commented that PPE are considered cumbersome for workers:

“Kasi dito sa nature ng trabaho, hindi pwede yung mga assistive device for safety katulad ng hard hat, boots. Hindi pwede dito kasi pampabigat yun eh.” (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

“Because of the nature of the work, we can't have assistive devices for safety like hard hats and boots. We can't use those here because they're heavy.” (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

In the absence of aquaculture-specific standards, the general OSH standards still apply. However, the owners' understanding of PPE is limited to hard hats and boots, which they deem irrelevant to fishponds and uncomfortable for workers. Consequently, they have the misconception that PPE is generally unnecessary for this sector, despite regular reports of cuts and anecdotal statements of worker deaths. While PPE is a preventive measure, it ranks lowest in the hierarchy of controls. This underscores the need to prioritize higher-level interventions such as hazard elimination, substitution, and engineering controls, alongside contextualizing the general OSH standards for the aquaculture sector to make them more obviously relevant and easier to follow.

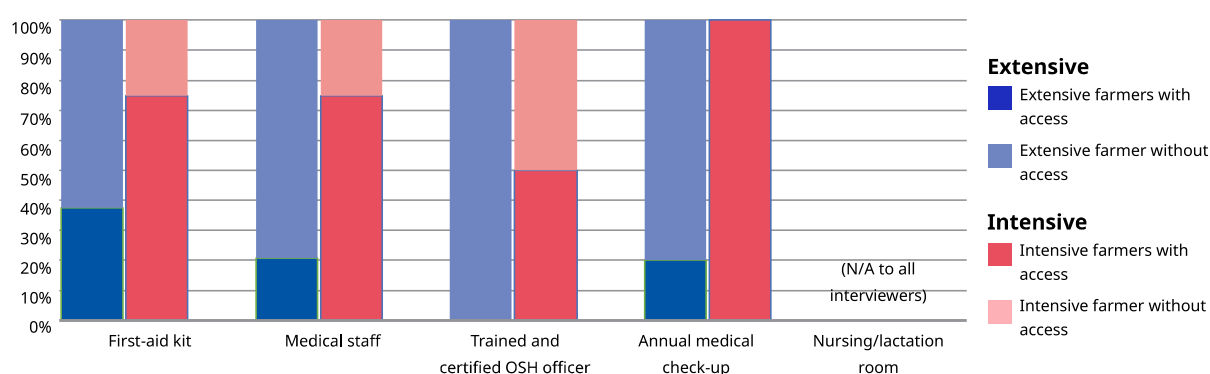
While a high proportion of extensive farmers said that they access to appropriate and functional equipment (such as knives/blades, saws, shovels, and pickaxes) and facilities (such as caretaker huts and fishpond gates), they showed significant unfamiliarity with OSH terminologies and the elements of a safe workplace, such as the presence of OSH policies, orientations on equipment use and hazardous chemical handling, and annual medical checkups (see Annex for questionnaire containing full details of OSH terminologies and elements examined). Most of their safety training has been acquired through on-the-job experience rather than formal education.

Most intensive shrimp farmers work with PPE such as boots, which is consistent with BFAR FPED's comment that intensive farms have more stringent OSH requirements due to biosecurity measures to prevent shrimp diseases. BFAR FPED conducts inspections for good aquaculture practices and reports that these facilities provide proper PPE such as disposable protective suits and boots.

“Oo, kanang botas, permente gyud na ang botas. Mo-request gyud mi ana kay gamit kaayo sa amoa pong pag-harvest. Kay katong mga tahod-tahod nga hait kaayo, depensa sad to sa amoang kuan, tiil. Kay og di nimo depensahan imong tiil, masamad gyud imohang lapalapa.” (intensive shrimp farm worker)

“Yes, those boots, boots are always a must. We will always request for those because they’re used a lot during harvesting. Because there are very sharp spines, the boots are protection for our feet. Because if you don’t wear protection for your foot, your sole will surely be injured.” (Intensive shrimp farmer)

► **Figure 45. Access to OSH facilities among shrimp farmers**



Despite a majority of the intensive shrimp farm workers reporting that they received training on safety protocols in the workplace, accidents still happen. One respondent said that a co-worker’s finger got cut off but that was because that person came to work drunk. The respondent did not mention whether the incident was reported to DOLE or whether workplace procedures were adjusted after the accident.

Interviewer: Naputol jud?

It [the finger] got cut off?

Respondent: Oh naputol jud.

Yes, it [the finger] got cut off.

Interviewer: Ngano man to, nakuan sa machine?

What happened, did it [get caught in] the machine?

Respondent: Oh parang iyang sanina, parang nakuan bitaw sa paddle, parang nasangit sa kuan. Nakaon nya tungod sad to sa iyang inom lage

Yes, his clothes got snagged in the paddle. [His clothes were] eaten because he’s always drinking.

Interviewer: Ah hubog sad diay ni-duty?

Drunk while on duty?

Respondent: oh hubog, wala na kuan na

Yes, drunk.

Only 20 per cent of extensive farmers reported having access to annual medical check-ups, but these check-ups were usually self-initiated in case of illness or injury. Access to first-aid kits was reported by 38 per cent of workers, with half provided by the employer and the rest using their own resources. Workers reported access to the barangay health centre provided by the LGU. There were no fishponds with licensed health and safety officers.

All interviewed intensive farmers reported having annual medical check-ups. This was also confirmed by BFAR FPED, which noted that intensive and semi-intensive farms provide yearly medical check-ups for their workers as part of their biosecurity measures to prevent disease in the shrimp. Some workers also reported that the company covered treatment for non-work-related injuries, such as a mild heart attack and lung issues from smoking. However, 50 per cent of workers said they did not have access to medical staff and 33 per cent said they did not have access to first aid kits, often having to pay for their own medicine. Those without access to medical staff expressed a desire for onsite clinics.

"Aw kana gyud naa, gyud dapat naa gyud clinic ba, in case naa gyud makuan ba naa gyud clinic para makuan dayon."
(intensive shrimp farm worker)

"There is [something missing], there should be a clinic just in case something might happen, there is a clinic that can assist immediately." (Intensive shrimp farmer)

Although most intensive workers had access to appropriate and functional equipment and facilities, one worker reported having to replace defective or missing equipment with their own money due to delays in fulfilling replacement requests.

"Usahay kanang mga tools. Request mi, dugay kaayo sad. Mamalit na lang gani mi'g uban tools amoa. Amoa na lang kaugalingon. Request mi'g kanang tester kay para sa kuryente? Wa man gihapon moabit. Wa man gihapon moabot. Palit na lang mi atong tester nga katong makaya-kaya ra pod namo." (Intensive shrimp farm worker)

"Sometimes, the tools. We make a request, but they take so long. We just bought the tools ourselves. We made a request for a tester for electricity? It still hasn't arrived. We ended up buying a tester that we could afford." (Intensive shrimp farmer)

None of the extensive shrimp farmers reported being inspected for OSH compliance. Fishpond owners mentioned visits from BFAR, but these were related to calamity damage inspections rather than safety standards. DOLE-BWC generally does not consider aquaculture to be an "inspectionable" sector due to its high degree of informality. The OSHC noted that reaching the aquaculture sector is challenging due to a lack of information and profiling. While general OSH regulations, policies, and training modules are designed to fit various sectors, OSHC acknowledges that the aquaculture industry may have unique safety and health requirements. Increased visibility and detailed information about the sector are necessary to provide effective, tailored interventions.

"So we would like to have more information. We would like to have information as to the safety and the requirements of the aquaculture industry, because at the moment, the regulations, the policies, even our even our training modules are generic in the sense that it should be able to fit the different sectors. But of course, there would be peculiarities, let's say, for the aquaculture industry as to safety and health requirements." (OSHC)

BFAR-FPED's inspection checklist for shrimp farms is based on good aquaculture practices, which includes OSH and labour laws compliance, but they only inspect intensive and semi-intensive farms. BFAR FPED also commented that extensive farms are likely not compliant.

"Tinatanong namin yan [(labour law requirements)] sa mga semi-intensive at intensive, pero sa extensive, most probably hindi. Hindi nga sila complaint, di ba?" (BFAR FPED)

"We ask those [(labour law requirements)] in semi-intensive and intensive, but in extensive, they're most probably not [compliant]. They're not compliant, right?" (BFAR FPED)

Consequently, BWC inspection data for aquaculture is limited to intensive farms, which are formal enterprises that meet the criteria for inspection. The following table includes the BWC inspection data for aquaculture, as also discussed in Section F. National and international legal frameworks related to the aquaculture industry on business, sustainability, labour and employment.

► Table 16. BWC inspection data for aquaculture (2023)

Region	Establishments Covered	Workers Covered	OSHS Compliance Rate
Region III	1	44	100%
Region VII	3	138	0%

Contrary to the qualitative findings and comments from BFAR FPED, OSH compliance in intensive farms is very low in Region VII. This discrepancy suggests conflicting government inspection data.

However, labour groups emphasize the need to cultivate an OSH culture in less formal segments before conducting inspections, as this segment is not yet capable of handling penalties and because existing OSH laws are tailored for more formalized establishments. Qualitative data supports this, indicating that extensive workers do not recognize harmful chemical substances as dangerous and do not use PPE despite accidents. Conversely, intensive workers understand the importance of PPE and the need for onsite clinics, showing a more ingrained culture of OSH in the formalized segment of the supply chain.

“Sa batas natin, sa OSH law, ganoon din, kasi ang setup sa batas is really for the formal sector. Hindi naman sinasabi na for formal sector, but makita mo ang penalty at requirements, hindi kaya ng informal sector. Kami sa amin dahil maliit ang capital, dapat i-cultivate muna ang culture of OSH, of safety, bago ka makapag-[inspect] sa kanila.” (Labour group)

“In our laws, in the OSH law, it's like that too, because the law is really set up for the formal sector. It doesn't say it's for the formal sector, but you can see that the informal sector can't handle those penalties and requirements. For us with small capital, we need to first cultivate the culture of OSH, of safety, before you inspect here.” (Labour group)

3.1.3.6. Equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination

Gender-based division of labour, a gender wage gap, and discrimination against vulnerable groups are prevalent in shrimp farming and often perceived as cultural norms.

Most interviewed workers have not experienced discrimination and stated that there is equal opportunity at the fishponds, although later described gender-based division of labour and discriminatory hiring practices against vulnerable groups. It should be noted that most interviewees were male.

Although gender-based division of labour was clearly observed in both extensive and intensive farms, the respondents did not consider this to be discriminatory. They consider it as a cultural norm because aquaculture is a labour-intensive industry and men are physically stronger and more physically able than women.

Among extensive shrimp farmers, men take more strenuous work (e.g., building and repairing dikes, harvesting), while women cook meals for workers during harvest and maintain the caretaker huts. They also sort the harvest and collect the smaller fishes remaining in the pond after the harvest (simot). However, male shrimp farm workers noted that some male caretakers cook and clean for themselves if they do not have wives.

Furthermore, male extensive farmers generally earn more than women. Male daily shrimp farm workers earn PhP 300 (5.13 USD) for a half day, with their wages increasing to PhP 600 to 700 (10.27-11.98 USD) for a full day during harvest time. In contrast, women hired to cook are paid PhP 500 (8.56 USD) per day. If it is the caretaker's wife who cooks, she may even be unpaid as her labour is considered as part of her husband's labour and salary. Additionally, men are also given more opportunities to work – male daily shrimp farmer workers are hired more often, while women are only hired to cook for the influx of workers during harvest season.

In intensive farms, women typically work in office jobs while men take on physically demanding tasks as caretakers. Notably, the office work performed by women generally requires higher educational qualifications compared to the physical labour carried out by men. As a result, women tend to have higher salaries compared to male caretakers who are not in supervisory roles.

"Women work in the office only, in marketing and [the] chemistry department." "No (female caretakers), the work is physically demanding, like lifting 20-kg feeds." (Water quality laboratory staff in intensive farm)

Extensive shrimp farm workers reported the presence of LGBTQIA+workers, but no LGBTQIA+workers were interviewed. The general sentiment among workers is that gay men can be hired if they are physically capable of doing the work ("Hindi malambot" ["Not soft [feminine]"]).

Respondents also described hiring biases against vulnerable groups in extensive shrimp farms:

"Pag hindi Katoliko, aalisin ko... Gusto namin Katoliko lahat." (extensive shrimp farm worker)

"If they aren't Catholic, I'll fire them. We want all Catholic workers." (extensive shrimp farm worker)

"Bawal po ang mga bakla magtrabaho sa fishpond. Kasi yung trabaho nila, asta babae eh." (extensive shrimp farm worker)

"Gay men are not allowed to work at fishponds. Because their work, they act like women." (extensive shrimp farm worker)

Respondents also reported a preference for younger workers or those without disabilities due to the labour-intensive nature of work at extensive fishponds. The Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association also echoed this aversion to hiring old and/or disabled workers:

"Hindi naman pwedeng gumamit ng mga vulnerable. Kasi ang trabaho sa fishpond operation o aquaculture, [kailangan] yung malalakas hindi pwede mahina. Manual [labour] kasi yan eh... Kaya kailangan ang mga workers mo, talagang malalakas sila. Hindi mo pwedeng i-hire yung mga vulnerable sectors." (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

"We can't use vulnerable workers. The work at fishponds or aquaculture requires strong workers, not weak ones. It's manual [labour]. That's why your workers really need to be strong. You can't hire from the vulnerable sectors." (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

Two interviewees recounted instances of discrimination in extensive farms, in which they witnessed elderly workers (over 50 years old) being reprimanded for working too slowly. However, some employers also reported retaining workers even though they were older than 60 years old because the workers needed the wages and they felt sorry for them ("naawa"). These older workers were reassigned to less strenuous tasks, such as sorting the harvest. BFAR FPED also reported the presence of disabled workers in aquaculture, such as mute boat operators or fishpond managers with mobility impairments.

"Kasi actually, meron kaming may edad na.... Ang pinapagawa ko sa kanya, yung magaan na trabaho nalang... Kasi yung iba, nagrereklamo. "Bakit ganun, bakit ganyan lang trabaho nyan? Parehas sweldo namin". Sabi ko "Tatanda ka rin. Maiintindihan mo." Kaya lang, dahil matagal na sa kumpanya, hindi mo sya pwedeng [paalisin] kasi wala na syang source of income." (Fishpond owner in Sasmuan)

"Actually, we have older workers. I assign them to lighter work. Other workers complain, "How come that's their only work? We're paid the same." I tell them, "You'll get older eventually. You'll understand." Because they've been working for me for a long time, I can't ask them to leave, since they won't have another source of income." (extensive shrimp farm owner)

Any instances of violence, discrimination, or harassment experienced by extensive farmers are reported directly to fishpond owners or to the barangay. Intensive farmers report these to their supervisors. The workers generally consider these channels to be effective, as issues are usually resolved this way. None of these cases are reported to government agencies.

Despite the limited or lack of visibility on reported cases of discrimination, DOLE-BWC noted that there is high national-level compliance regarding equality and non-discrimination. The interviewed agencies also emphasized that equality should be present in the sector due to policies such as Safe Spaces Act and the ratification of ILO Convention 190, and GAD (Gender and Development) programs. The agencies also stressed that all their programs and interventions are accessible to all without discrimination.”

“Well, I think the major issue there would be the stereotyping of roles of specific groups in the aquaculture sector. That is something cultural and prevalent currently existing in all aquaculture establishments that we have. There is the stereotype, for example, men are more engaged on production and post-production stages, while women are in post-harvest and marketing. Personally, I don't believe that because there are women in other countries that are able to do better, for example, in pre-production and even in production stages.

Yes, we are doing it in the aquaculture industry. We've been providing trainings in pre-production and production techniques, not just for men, but for women as well. We know for a fact that they can be good employees that will cater for the pre-production and production stages. Even the PWDs, we have a specific programme with that. Currently I had a meeting with the national organization of PWDs and we are trying to come up with some programs in a way that will benefit them, for urban aquaculture, aquaponics, that will provide alternative income for PWDs.” (BFAR)

Additionally, DOLE-BLE highlighted that aquaculture employers in remote areas are less aware of workers' rights concerning anti-discrimination.

Furthermore, BWC noted that workers themselves may not be fully aware of their rights to workplace equality and non-discrimination. Despite the efforts of labour organizations, information about these rights often does not reach the grassroots level.

3.1.3.7. Child labour and forced labour

Child labour is present in intensive shrimp farms, where children aged 15 to 17 work at night to early morning the next day to harvest shrimp and pack them in boxes.

Extensive shrimp farm workers did not report the presence of underage workers. Although some of the interviewed extensive shrimp farmers started working at 17 years old or younger, the majority reported that workers aged 15-17 or 15 and below are no longer common in the sector. As underage workers, their tasks and working hours were the same as adult daily workers, which included hard physical labour. They were paid the same wages as the adults.

There were also no instances of forced labour among all extensive shrimp farmer interviewees. All workers felt that they could switch to other employers if offered higher salaries or better working conditions.

However, child labour was reported present in the intensive shrimp farms, where children aged 15-17 are hired to assist during the harvest. They work at night to early morning, usually sorting and sizing the harvested shrimp and packing them into polystyrene boxes with ice. They are paid Php 200 (3.42 USD) per day. One worker said that the children only work for one to two hours per day, but this was not mentioned by other interviewees. The workers said that some children still go to school, while some do not. The presence of working children in the farm at these hours is a violation of RA 9231, which states that children aged 15-17 are not allowed to work from 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM the next day.

In response, DOLE-BWSC has initiatives to combat child labour that extend to the sector, including the Philippine Programme Against Child Labour, which involves profiling, livelihood assistance, and family support services. None of the respondents mentioned this initiative, although it was also not asked explicitly.

3.1.4. Social protection

3.1.4.1. Social security

Extensive shrimp farm workers have low access to social security benefits from their employers and perceive these as unapplicable to them. Intensive shrimp farm workers have access to social security benefits.

Access to social security benefits among extensive shrimp farmers is generally low. This is considered the norm where the interviews were conducted. Receiving social security benefits is associated with employment in “companies”, referring to larger establishments. This suggests that the workers do not see the extensive shrimp farms as “companies”, and this point of view needs to be addressed.

“Hindi uso sa mga bantay yun. Sa kumpanya lang ata uso yun.” (extensive shrimp farm worker)

“It’s not common among caretakers. I think it’s only common in companies.” (extensive shrimp farm worker)

“Wala pong SS sa fishpond, wala pong Pag-IBIG.” (extensive shrimp farm worker)

“There’s no SS at fishponds, no Pag-IBIG.” (extensive shrimp farm worker)

Extensive shrimp farm owners also generally do not believe they need to provide benefits to their workers, including permanent, full-time caretakers. They view it as the government’s responsibility to ensure workers have access to these benefits. This impression is incorrect as they are formal registered enterprises and so they are mandated to provide these benefits to their workers.

Interviewer: Nagbibigay po kayo sa mga bantay ng SSS, Philhealth, Pag-IBIG?

Do you give your caretakers SSS, Philhealth, and Pag-IBIG?

Respondent: No. Hindi kami gobyerno eh.

No. We’re not the government.

► **Table 17. Access to social security aquaculture workers**

Minimum government-mandated benefits	Extensive shrimp farmers with access	Intensive shrimp farmers with access
SSS	8%	100%
Employees’ Compensation Programme (ECC)	0%	100%
Philhealth	13%	100%
Pag-IBIG	4%	100%

Extensive shrimp farm workers who reported having access to social security have access due to previous employment. Respondents expressed that they wanted these benefits but don’t expect it from the fishpond owners.

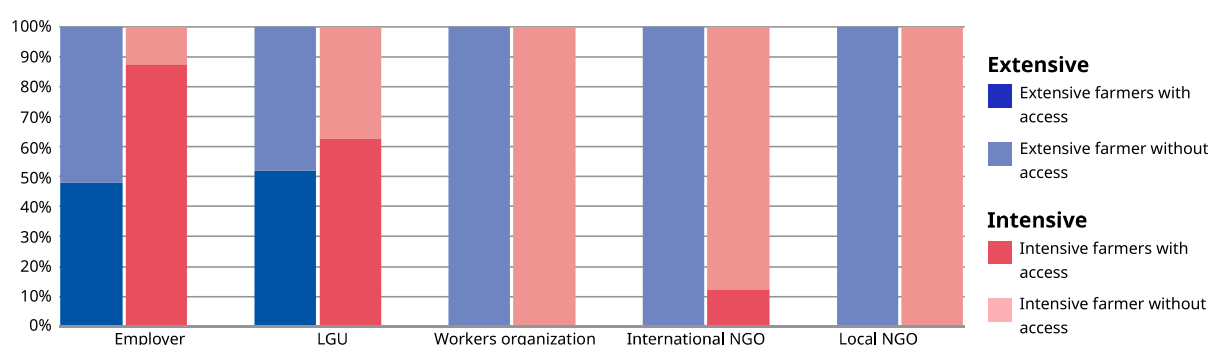
In contrast, all interviewed intensive shrimp farmers have access to the minimum government-mandated benefits and some have successfully claimed these benefits, such as SSS loans and Pag-IBIG housing loan.

3.1.4.2. Calamity-related assistance and other assistance

Employers and the LGU are the main sources of calamity-related assistance for both extensive and intensive shrimp farm workers. Extensive shrimp farm workers also receive non-calamity-related support from government agencies.

During calamities, both extensive and intensive shrimp farmers receive assistance from their employers, typically in the form of cash, relief goods (such as rice and canned goods) and building materials to help repair their homes from damage from calamities. Fishpond owners also provide relief goods or cash donations to LGUs to support their calamity relief efforts.

► **Figure 46. Sources of calamity-related assistance received by shrimp farmers**



Extensive shrimp farmers also receive non-calamity-related assistance from LGUs and government agencies. LGUs, through DOLE, provide support through programs like Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/ Displaced Workers (TUPAD), offering emergency employment and scholarships for their children. DSWD and BFAR also offer benefits such as the DSWD's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Programme (4Ps), and food or cash assistance. No workers reported receiving aid from educational institutions or local NGOs.

3.1.5. Social dialogue and tripartism

There are no worker representative organizations (including trade unions) specific to aquaculture workers or alternative organized channels for worker representation, dialogue and bargaining. Farm workers are generally uninterested in forming workers groups because they do not perceive these as necessary and misunderstand the purpose of such groups.

DOLE has policies in registering workers groups. However, interviewees reported that there are no registered groups that are specific to aquaculture. The interviewed labour groups had limited presence in the aquaculture sector. The respondents were also not aware of any groups. None of the interviewed workers reported alternative channels for social dialogue, such as workers' welfare committee, OSH committee, etc.

In Sasmuan, there are no formal workers' groups for shrimp farmers or aquaculture workers. Although the Federation of Fisherfolk of Sasmuan includes fishermen who also engage in aquaculture work, they are primarily registered as fisherfolk. There is no separate formal group for aquaculture workers.

Some respondents form informal groups that occasionally provide financial assistance for hospitalizations among members, formed with their employer's encouragement to support each other during times of need.

Nearly half (45 per cent) of the extensive farmers are uninterested in forming formal workers' groups. They consider these groups unnecessary due to the small number of workers at each fishpond and the generally harmonious relationships with their employer. If work issues arise, they feel they can simply transfer to a different employer.

"Ayoko na [ng samahan]. Minsan kasi hindi maganda yun eh. At tsaka ilang katao lang kami sa fishpond." (Sasmuan extensive shrimp farm worker)

"I don't want a workers' group. Sometimes those aren't good. And we're only a few people here at the fishpond." (Sasmuan extensive shrimp farm worker)

"Hindi na dahil nagkakasundo naman kami sa palaisdaan. Hindi na kailangan [ng samahan]." (Sasmuan extensive shrimp farm worker)

"No because we get along anyway at the fishponds. We don't need workers' groups." (Sasmuan extensive shrimp farm worker)

On the other hand, the 55 per cent of extensive farmers interested in forming groups believed membership could provide benefits and assistance, as well as a sense of unity in times of need.

"Para kung sakali halimbawa, ma-aksidente ka, may benepisyo kang matatanggap." (Sasmuan extensive shrimp farm worker)

"[I'm interested in forming a workers' group] because if ever you get into an accident, you can receive benefits." (Sasmuan extensive shrimp farm worker)

"Okay lang naman, dahil seguridad po ng mga manggagawa, na kailangan, meron din silang patakaran na nagsusuportahan sila, may unity sila." (Sasmuan shrimp farm owner)

"It would be okay [to have a workers' group], because it's for the security of the workers who need it. So they have regulations that will support them. So that they have unity." (Sasmuan shrimp farm owner)

Extensive farmers are generally uneducated about the functions of workers' groups. Even among those interested in forming such groups, most did not see their potential to advocate for rights, improve working conditions, and provide collective bargaining power. They do not fully appreciate the advantages of joining or forming these groups.

"Hindi pa pumapasok sa isip nila what a union can do for them." (Municipal Agricultural Office of Sasmuan)

"It hasn't occurred to them what a union can do for them." (Municipal Agricultural Office of Sasmuan)

The shrimp farm owners of Sasmuan previously organized into an association. During the meetings, they discussed things such as worker wages and whether they can provide the workers' requested wage rate.

"Nagpapalitan kami ng inputs diba 'pag nagmi-meeting. Kahit sa pasahod ay nagpapalitan din kami. "Magkano ba ngayon ang prevailing rate?" Kasi kung minsan ang mga trabahador mismo, sila ang nagre-request ng raise. Actually, nag-start 'yan PhP 175 lang, many years ago. Ngayon nasa PhP 350 na, PhP 300. Kasi manggagaling sa kanila kung sufficient ba yung patrabaho mo o yung kita nila. Kami naman, "Ok, pwede naman. Why not? I-increase natin." Doon na nagkakaroon ng effect, para maging uniform ang pasahod namin. Gano'n lang kami rito. Kung tanungin mo yung mga [trabahador] namin, yung mga makalumang operators, ang pasweldo ay PhP 250. PhP 250 ang hindi naming sakop. May mga hindi kami members. Pero kaming mga members, as much as possible, kung ano yung pinag-usapan namin ay yun yung ini-implement." (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

"We exchange inputs during meetings. Even for wages, we exchange inputs. "How much is the prevailing [wage] rate?" Because sometimes, the workers themselves request for a raise. Actually, it started at PhP 175 (3.00 USD) many years ago. Now, it's at PhP 350 (5.99 USD), PhP 300 (5.13 USD) [per day]. Because it comes from them whether their wage is sufficient. On our side, "Okay, we can do that. Why not? Let's increase it.". That's where there's an effect so that our wages are uniform. That's how we do it. If you ask them [our workers], the old school operators pay PhP 250 (4.28 USD). [Our association] doesn't cover [the farms] that give PhP 250 (4.28 USD). There are farms that aren't our members. But for our members, as much as possible, we implement what we talked about." (Sasmuan Shrimp Farm Owners Association)

However, the association is now inactive due to members passing away without turning over responsibilities to their successors.

Because there are no formal employment arrangements between the workers and the extensive shrimp farm owners, both parties are informally balancing what the workers want and what the employers are willing to offer. Workers consider the flexible working arrangements to be preferable because they can just transfer to a different farm if needed. However, should the farm owners collectively agree on what the typical working conditions and wages are, and these are less than what the workers request, this will put the unorganized workers at a disadvantage.

On the other hand, none of the interviewed intensive farmers were interested in forming workers groups. Two respondents mentioned that a union previously existed in their workplace, but neither were members nor know exactly why the union is no longer active.

Interviewer: Ngano na wa man to kato nga union?

Why is there no more union?

Respondent: Murag na undang sir kay wa man to nagsilbi.

It stopped sir because it doesn't have help.



3.2. Shrimp processing plants

3.2.1 Profile of respondents

3.2.1.1. Processing plant employers

No shrimp processing plant employers were interviewed. All the companies contacted in Cebu declined or did not respond to requests to be interviewed.

The interviewed workers are employed in a facility that processes a variety of seafood products, including shrimp, crabs, octopus, scallops, and abalone. What is processed depends on what arrives at the plant. The plant employs an estimated 100 to 200 workers, depending on the time of year. The workers report that the processed seafood is exported to the US and Hong Kong.

3.2.1.2. Processing workers

Seafood processing workers have at least a high school-level education and are aged 18 years old and above.

Potential workers to be interviewed were approached outside of their place of work in Cebu province. However, all refused to be interviewed. Some workers seemed afraid to be interviewed.

The four (4) workers interviewed for this study are employed by one seafood processing plant in Cebu. All respondents are team leaders and supervise workers in the processing area. All were selected by their employer to participate in the interview. The interviews were conducted onsite, in the plant's offices. All interviewed workers are women aged 30-49. None of the workers have disabilities. The highest educational attainment among the interviewees has high school graduate.

Worker tasks vary slightly depending on the nature of the final product. Seafood meant to be frozen such as shrimps, scallops, squid, and octopus under are unloaded in the receiving area, sorted by size, then weighed. Workers then wash and clean them, removing sand and other debris and parts such as shrimp heads and squid beak, pen, and guts. The seafood undergoes a second washing, then are bagged and packed. They are then frozen, then packed into boxes.

For seafood that will be canned such as crab meat, the seafood is received, weighed, and sorted. Workers clean the crab meat by manually removing foreign matter like crab shells and pieces of plastic. The crab meat is then placed in open cans. Quality Control workers take samples of the canned crab meat and if it passes, the cans are sealed, and the crab meat is cooked inside the cans. After cooking, the cans are passed to the packing section, where workers pack the cans in boxes then seal them.

Workers in the seafood processing plants are assigned to specific areas but may be moved to work in different areas of operations, depending on operational needs. All respondents worked in the operations areas, with two working in frozen seafood, one in crab meat processing, and one in crab meat packing.

3.2.2. Employment creation

3.2.2.1. Recruitment practices

Seafood processing workers are formally employed, typically first working as a contractual worker before becoming a probationary employee, then a regular employee. They go through a standard pre-employment process.

At present, workers in the seafood processing facility are recruited by the company directly as contractual workers. After five months, the contractual workers may be re-hired by the company as probationary workers, with a probationary period of six months. If they meet the performance requirements, they are regularized.

This practice is a remnant of the time from when the company used manpower agencies. The workers interviewed started with the company in 2008 to 2013. All were initially hired through manpower agencies. One worker's six-month contract was renewed four to five times before she became a probationary employee, then a regular employee. Another worker was transferred through three different manpower agencies while still working at the plant before she was hired as a probationary employee, then a regular employee.

"Tulo man to ka-agency. Gi-kuan kuan lang mi, ma-end mi sa usa ka agency, pasa pud mi sa laing agency hangtod matuyok namo. Inig homan namo og tuyok, direct nami. diha nami maregular."

"Hapit mag-two years kay mag 5 months or 6 months man siguro ng agency."

"Diretso naman, automatic na. Karon kay lahi naman, gitangtang na ang agency. Wala pud ko kahibaw." (seafood processing worker)

"There are three agencies here in the company. Once our contract ends in one agency, we will be passed to the next agency. Once done [with all three agencies], [we become] direct employees. That's how we become regular [employees].

It's almost two years [to become a regular employee] since it would take 5 to 6 months per agency.

Now it's direct. It's automatic. It's different now. They've removed the agency. I don't know [what happened]."

Workers are not charged any fees at any stage of the recruitment process.

All workers sign contracts when they become contractual workers, then another contract if they are absorbed by the company as a probationary employee. The written contracts state the worker's job description, salary, and benefits (if any). Contracts are in English but are explained by Human Resources representatives to the workers in the local language.

Workers find out about job openings through word of mouth from relatives, friends, or neighbours. While there are other job opportunities available, they prefer working in this seafood processing facility because it's close to their homes, so they can save both time and money on transportation. The facility also doesn't have a night shift, unlike other potential employers.

"Number one is duol sa akoang lugar. Unya number two ok-han rako diri nga trabaho, unlike didto sa MEPZA [Mactan Economic Processing Zone]. Number one, mag-adjust pako sa akong time sa pagtravel. Unya pag-uli kapoy napud. Maayo diri duol ra one ride ra." (seafood processing worker)

"Number one is it's near where I live. Number two, the work here is okay, unlike in MEPZA [Mactan Economic Processing Zone]. Number one, I'll have to adjust my travel time. Then I'm tired when I get home. It's better here, just one ride [to work]."

3.2.2.2. Skills development

Seafood processing workers receive training that is relevant to their jobs.

All workers reported receiving mandatory training from their employer on Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), which includes proper sanitation and hygiene, quality management, and use of equipment. This is mandatory for all workers because the employer is certified to international food safety standards.

Prior to starting work, all new workers receive orientations with Human Resources, Quality Assurance, and their respective department heads on their tasks, including practices and procedures.

“Kay mo agi man mi ug orientation sa QA [Quality Assurance] about sa mga practices mga ingon ana. Human [Resources] ana mag orient pajud na ang department head na mao ni imong possible na trabaho. Murag basic lang na sturyahon ba na mao ni. Ang kami sa mga leader ang amoa ato is hands-on na jud ka na mao ni imong kuan para ma-orient sila na naa na silay idea lang ba. Murag sturya lang, kami didto ang mo tudlo lang sa mga taw na mo lihok ba jud ka.” (seafood processing worker)

“We go through an orientation with QA [Quality Assurance] on practices, like that. Human [Resources] does the orientation, then the department head on your possible tasks. Just the basic talk. As team leaders, we are hands-on so that they're oriented and have an idea [of the work]. We talk, teach them and demonstrate the tasks.”

Training in their specific area of work is provided through on-the-job training from the team leaders.

“Kasagaran ang leader raman na ang mo train sa bag-o na mo sud ingnon rami unsay dapat buhaton unsay technique. Kailangan sa amoang crabmeat kay ang lambay ba, kay hinayon jud nimo siya kay kung ma-subraan gani kay ma-lata man. Apil man sa specs sa buyer na dapat firm pa siya. Naa siyay lata pero gamay pero dili siya kaaugingana.” (seafood processing worker)

“Usually, the team leader trains the new [employees] on what to do and techniques. For example, you should handle crabmeat carefully because if you overdo it, it becomes mushy. The buyer's specs [specifications] say it should be firm. A little mushiness is allowed but it shouldn't be like that.”

Team leaders also receive leadership training given by the Human Resources department. Some respondents also said that workers are sent to external training, but they are unsure what that training was for.

3.2.2.3. Termination practices

Termination practices for seafood processing workers follows the requirements set by the Labor Code.

Interviewed workers said that their employer has written policies and procedures regarding termination. They do not personally know anyone who was terminated but said that the most common reason for worker termination is stealing from the company. However, the company still follows due process and does not terminate workers immediately. This is in line with the protections afforded by the Labor Code.

“Dili man na sila mo ditso ug pa hawa sir. I-imbestigahan man jud nila. Tan-awn nila, mao sad daghan mi ug CCTV diri, nya makita jud. e-agi jud nila ug due process. Murag para nako consequence sad sa ilang nabuhat.” (seafood processing worker)

“They don't fire someone right away, sir. They investigate first. They look into it, and we have a lot of CCTV [cameras] here so they can see. They go through due process. [If someone gets fired] For me, it's a consequence of what they did.”

3.2.2.4. Insecurity and non-standard forms of employment

Seafood processing workers that are considered regular employees have security of tenure as provided by the Labor Code. There are written policies and procedures in place that prevent workers from being terminated without just cause and due process.

Workers that are probationary are also made aware of performance requirements for them to become regularized.

During the peak catch season, the processing facility hires additional seasonal workers with fixed-term contracts. Outside of the peak season, there are around 40 workers in the processing area. During peak season, this increases to 100 workers. These seasonal workers are pulled out once they are no longer needed in operations.

“Kung panahon nga in-season, daghan gyud kaa mi kay ang production mag-huot gyud na kay kanang daghan gyud ba. Pero panahon ganing gamay ra, hinay lang ang kuan, mao nang ma-pull out gyud tong mga casual namo. Pull out na sila murag ang ilang kontrata dili na sila i-extend ana. Mga 100 siguro mi or less.” (seafood processing worker)

“During the in-season, there are a lot of us and the production [area] will get crowded because there are a lot [of people]. But when it's [the catch] small, [processing is] slow, the casual [workers] will be pulled out. They will be pulled out and their contracts will not be extended. We're around 100 [people] more or less.”

3.2.2.5. Emerging environment and technological issues

Declining seafood catch was identified as an issue for their work, although the root cause of the declining catch varied among the workers. Half said typhoons reduced the fishers' fishing time at sea, but only one identified climate change as the cause of stronger typhoons.

Other identified concerns were business-related, such as increased competition among seafood processing companies, increased costs in running the business, meeting the requirements of their buyers, and attracting more buyers.

3.2.3. Standards and rights at work

3.2.3.1. Working conditions

Working conditions of seafood processing workers fulfil the requirements of the Labor Code.

Workers typically work 8-hour shifts from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM, Monday to Saturday. Working hours may be extended by two to four hours of overtime to finish processing large volumes of seafood delivered. Deliveries must be processed immediately to meet buyers' standards, ensuring they are canned or frozen promptly within the required timeframe.

The weekly day off is typically Sunday, but this may change depending on operational needs, such as when the seafood is delivered for processing. If seafood is delivered on Sunday, then they are required to work. The day off is then rescheduled for when there are no new deliveries. If there are two consecutive days without deliveries, then the workers in the section with no deliveries will be temporarily reassigned to assist in other tasks.

Workers have three breaks within the shift: 15 minutes at around 10:00 AM, one hour around 12:00 NN, and 15 minutes around 3:00 PM. However, the machines in the processing area continue running so workers in the same production team take turns in taking their break to ensure that there is always at least one person working in the processing area.

3.2.3.2. Wages

Wages of seafood processing workers meet the requirements of the Labor Code.

Workers in team leader positions receive daily wages that are slightly higher than minimum wage (PhP 488 or 8.35 USD per day in Cebu). No entry-level workers were interviewed, but the team leaders said that entry-level workers receive the minimum wage, and that they themselves received the local minimum daily wage when they started working at the company (PhP 468 or 8.01 USD per day in Cebu at present). All the workers interviewed felt their income was sufficient to support themselves and their families. However, one worker supplemented their income by selling miscellaneous dry goods, such as clothing.

3.2.3.3. Wage-related benefits

Interviewed workers shared that regular workers receive the minimum government-mandated benefits that apply to daily wages, such as holiday pay, premium pay, overtime pay, and night differential. They are also aware of the multipliers involved in the calculation of their pay, such as 200 per cent pay for working on a regular holiday and 130 per cent pay for overtime and working on a special holiday. They receive 13th month pay, separation

pay, retirement pay, sick leave (seven days), annual leave (seven days), and maternity leave. The company also provides performance incentives, and services awards depending on years of service (e.g., 10, 15, and 20 years with the company).

The interviewed workers reported different arrangements for contractual and probationary workers. Contractual and probationary workers receive pay-related benefits such as holiday pay, premium pay, overtime pay, and night differential. Contractual workers whose contracts had ended received separation pay. Some contractual workers receive seven days of leave, while some have six-month contracts with no paid leaves. Interviewed workers did not specify whether contractual or probationary workers also receive 13th month pay. However, please note that the current situation of contractual and probationary workers could not be verified independently as no contractual or probationary workers were interviewed.

3.2.3.4. Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

Workers reported that their employer has written Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) policies and procedures in place. Workers are oriented on the safety protocols of their workstation, including how to handle and dispose of sharp tools (e.g., knives).

There is a designated locked storage area for chemicals and access is limited. There are chemicals present in the production area, but workers reported that it's safe to use them as long as you use them in the correct concentration. Identified chemicals include chlorine and sodium tripolyphosphate (STPP). STPP is used as a preservative for shrimp.

The workers also have personal protective equipment (PPE), based on the task assigned. All the interviewed workers are in the production line for processing seafood, so they are required to wear a shirt, pants, lab gown, boots, head cap, mask, hairnet, and apron. They also have gloves and jacket for protection against the cold temperature in the workplace and sharp tools. Workers' PPE are checked for completeness prior to entering the work area, including checking that their pockets are empty of all objects that may contaminate the seafood. None of the workers mentioned the presence of other higher-level prevention measures in the hierarchy of controls such as engineering controls (e.g., tool guards) or administrative controls (e.g., rotating tasks to limit exposure to cold environments).

However, some employees preferred not to wear gloves because they could not feel the seafood properly with the gloves on. They used hourly hand sanitation instead to preserve food safety.

"Naa man mi gloves sir pero dili man jud required na magsuot ka ng gloves pirme na kailangan jud ka magsuot, depende ra jud na pero di pasabot na di mi mag gloves kuan man naa sad mi kuan sanitation sa kamot na every hour mag sanitize sad ka nya mag check sad sila if naay bacteria, naa man part sa crab na dili kaau nimo ma feel kay naka gloves man ka, ma feel ra jud nimo kung kamoton nimo." (shrimp processing plant worker)

We have gloves, but it's not always required to wear them. It depends, but even if we don't wear gloves, we have hand sanitation every hour and they check for bacteria. There are parts of the crab that you can't feel well if you're wearing gloves. You can only feel it properly if you touch it with your hands.

The workers also reported receiving training from the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) on fire safety. The BFP also assists the company during its annual fire and earthquake drills. The workers also reported the presence of an onsite Safety Officer who also served as the leader of the in-house fire brigade.

Common injuries in the production line are cuts on the hands from knives and open cans. First aid kits are available. There is no clinic, but a doctor visits the plant once a week to do checkups upon request. Serious injuries are brought to the nearby hospital for treatment. Workers have an annual medical checkup, including a drug test.

3.2.3.5. Equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination

Workers reported the presence of gender-based division of labour. Men work in the more physically demanding areas, such as packing finished goods into boxes and in the warehouse. Men also operate the machines. Females are in the processing area. There are some males in the processing area, but as washers. There are both male and female team leaders. The workers also reported that both males and females are provided the same training opportunities.

None of the interviewed workers had experienced discrimination or inequality in the workplace. They reported equal opportunities for vulnerable groups, but that workers must be at least 18 years old to work. Any instances of violence, discrimination, or harassment could be reported directly to their supervisors, or the workers “talk it out” among themselves.

3.2.3.6. Child labour and forced labour

All workers reported that there were no workers aged 15-17 or 15 and below in the processing plant. Human Resources personnel check the documents provided by applicants, which include a birth certificate.

There were also no instances of forced labour among all the interviewees. All workers felt that they could switch to other employers if offered higher salaries but were not inclined to do so.

3.2.4. Social protection

3.2.4.1. Social security

Workers are registered and contributing members of SSS, Philhealth, and Pag-IBIG. Premiums are deducted from their wages monthly. They also reported accessing these benefits at various times (e.g., loan and maternity benefits from SSS, Philhealth coverage during childbirth). They also have private health insurance provided by the employer.

3.2.4.2. Calamity-related assistance and other assistance

Workers reported receiving calamity-related assistance from the municipality and the province in the form of cash, groceries, and grocery cards. Some reported receiving assistance from their employer, while some did not.

3.2.5. Social dialogue and tripartism

There is no union in the plant where the workers are employed. There is an employees’ cooperative, but its main purpose is to provide loans for member employees. When asked about the possibility of forming a workers’ group, one respondent said that it was “prohibited” by the company.

Interviewer: Gibawalan jud na nga mag-grupo-grupo?

Forming groups is prohibited here?

Worker: Hm...

Yes

Interviewer: Giunsa man pagsulti ato sa inyong meeting nga nganong gibawalan na?

How was it told during the meeting that it's prohibited?

Worker: Kay katong pagstorya ana kay kasagaran mag-meeting kay taga-HR man in-ana nya bawal mag-grupo-grupo kay naka-cause kuno ug away in-ana.

When that was discussed, most of the meetings is held by the HR and they prohibit such groups because it can cause fights and like that

However, this could not be verified through other means. One informant was hesitant to respond to questions regarding working conditions because the HR Officer was just in an adjacent office.

The company organizes monthly meetings with all team leaders, but issues raised during these meetings are mostly about the work, such as running low on materials.

Workers said that their employer has a grievance process. Workers can inform their team leaders about any complaints or concerns. The team leaders then forward the concerns to the assistant department head, who forwards it to the department head. The department head then addresses the concerns.