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# Risk Factor and Symptoms of Back Pain in Coastal Fisherman in Jaya Bakti Village Banggai

**Ricky Yuliam[1*], Muh. Ali Hi Palanro[1], Mohamad Zulfikar[1]**

[1]Department of Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Alkhairaat Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author. E-mail: riyuma@ymail.com Mobile number: +6281355204080

**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction**: Back pain is a significant global musculoskeletal health issue, particularly affecting occupational groups with high physical demands, such as fishermen. This study aimed to describe demographic factors (age), lifestyle (smoking, alcohol consumption), socioeconomic status, and accompanying symptoms associated with back pain in a population of coastal fishermen in Jaya Bakti Village, Pagimana, Banggai Regency.
**Methods:** This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach, collecting data through structured questionnaires. The study sample consisted of 62 fishermen selected from the population at the research site.
**Result:** Analysis of 62 respondents showed the majority were over 25 years old (40.3% aged 25-35; 50.0% aged >36 years). Lifestyle analysis in a sub-sample of 21 respondents revealed a very high prevalence of smoking (90.5%) and alcohol consumption in 38.1% of respondents. Income data from 41 respondents indicated the majority (63.4%) earned between IDR 500,000 until IDR 1,000,000 per month. 20 respondents reporting back pain, the most dominant accompanying symptoms were headache (90%) and reported loss of consciousness (85%). This finding is atypical for mechanical low back pain and may reflect misinterpretation of symptoms or other underlying conditions, requiring further clinical investigation, followed by pain radiating to the abdomen (60%).
**Conclusion:** This descriptive study concludes that back pain among fishermen in the study location tends to occur in older age groups and may be exacerbated by high smoking rates. The reported accompanying symptoms, particularly the high frequency of self-reported episodes suggestive of loss of consciousness or presyncope.

**Keywords**: Back pain; fishermen; occupational health; risk factors; symptoms

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## Introduction

Low Back Pain, especially Low Back Pain (LBP), is a global epidemic that affects the quality of life of millions of people and is the leading cause of years lived with disability (YLD) worldwide. [1,2] This burden is not only individual but also social and economic, including direct health care costs and indirect costs due to decreased work productivity.[3] Certain groups of workers, especially those involved in heavy manual work, are exposed to a higher risk of developing this musculoskeletal condition. Fishermen are one of the professions with a high risk of musculoskeletal disorders, including back pain. Characteristics of fishermen's work such as lifting heavy weights (nets, catches, ice), working in a hunched or awkward posture for long periods of time, exposure to whole-body vibration (WBV) from boat engines, as well as unstable working conditions due to boat movement at sea, all contribute to biomechanical stress on the spine.[4,5,6] The accumulation of this exposure can lead to microinjuries, degeneration of the intervertebral discs, and muscle strain, which manifests as back pain.

In addition to occupational factors, individual and lifestyle factors also play an important role in the pathogenesis of back pain. Old age is consistently associated with an increased prevalence of back pain, often associated with degenerative changes in the spine.[2] Lifestyles such as smoking have been shown to be associated with an increased risk of back pain, possibly through mechanisms involving disc nutrition disorders and increased systemic inflammation.[7,8] Alcohol consumption, especially in excessive amounts, can also affect bone and musculoskeletal health in general.[9] Socioeconomic factors, such as income levels, can indirectly affect the risk of back pain through access to healthcare, working conditions, and nutritional status.[10] Understanding the profile of back pain and related factors in specific populations such as coastal capture fishers is critical to designing effective prevention and management interventions. This research was conducted in Jaya Bakti Village, Pagimana District, Banggai Regency, a coastal community where the majority of the population depends on capture fisheries. This study aims to provide a descriptive picture of demographic characteristics (age), lifestyle (smoking, alcohol), income, and the type and frequency of comorbidity symptoms experienced by fishermen in this region who report back pain.

## Methods

This observational analytic study with a cross-sectional design was conducted at Dr. Sardjito General Hospital, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, from October 2022 to February 2023. The study involved 34 adult patients diagnosed with chronic hepatitis B (CHB) who met the inclusion criteria of being aged 18 years or older, having a confirmed CHB diagnosis, and providing informed consent to undergo laboratory testing

and liver stiffness assessment. Patients with co-infection by other hepatitis viruses (HCV or HDV), other chronic liver diseases, or severe coagulopathy were excluded. Venous blood samples were collected to measure gamma-glutamyl transferase (GGT), albumin, alkaline phosphatase (ALP), and platelet count using automated analyzers. Based on these laboratory values, three non-invasive indices were calculated: the Gamma-glutamyl Transferase to Albumin Ratio (GAR), the Alkaline Phosphatase to Platelet Ratio (APPR), and the Alkaline Phosphatase plus Gamma-glutamyl Transferase to Platelet Ratio (AGPR). Liver stiffness was measured using shear wave elastography (SWE) performed by two trained radiologists following standardized procedures, and fibrosis stages were categorized according to the Metavir scoring system (F0–F4). The median SWE value for each participant was used for staging, and inter-observer agreement was determined using Cohen's kappa coefficient. All laboratory and imaging procedures adhered to internal and external quality control standards.

**Research design**

This study employs a quantitative descriptive research design to delineate the characteristics and frequency of the variables examined within the population of coastal capture fishermen in Jaya Bakti Village, Pagimana, Banggai Regency.

**Setting and Sample/Participants**

The research was conducted in Jaya Bakti Village, Pagimana District, Banggai Regency. The target population is coastal fishermen in the village. Sampling appears to use non-probability techniques such as convenience sampling. The number of respondents varied for the analysis of different variables: age data were analyzed from 62 respondents, lifestyle data (smoking and alcohol) from a sub-sample of 21 respondents, income data from 41 respondents, and symptom data accompanying back pain from a sub-sample of 20 respondents who specifically reported experiencing back pain. The inclusion criteria are likely to be active fishermen in Jaya Bakti Village, while the exclusion criteria are not mentioned in the source data. The difference in sample size between variables is a limitation that needs to be considered.

**Measurement and Data Collection**

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaire instruments that were distributed to fisher respondents. The questionnaire included a section on demographic data (age), lifestyle (smoking status, alcohol consumption), socioeconomic data (monthly income), and a specific section on symptoms that accompany back pain (pain radiating to the abdomen, loss of consciousness, headache, confusion) for the respondents who experienced it. This questionnaire appears to have been developed for this study, but information regarding the validity and reliability of the instrument is not available in the source data. Data is collected directly from respondents, possibly through structured interviews or self-filling. Reports of loss of consciousness were based solely on self-reported questionnaires and were not clinically verified.

**Data analysis**

The data collected from the questionnaire was processed and analyzed descriptively using absolute

frequency and percentage calculations for each category of variables. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of frequency tables and narratives. No inferential statistical analysis (e.g., relationship or difference tests) was reported, in accordance with the descriptive objectives of this study. Data processing is likely to use basic statistical software or spreadsheets.

**Ethical considerations**

Although not explicitly stated, it is assumed that this study has considered ethical aspects. Oral or written consent should be obtained from each respondent following an explanation of the study's purpose. The confidentiality of respondent data is preserved. Information concerning approval from the research ethics committee is not included in the source data.

**Result**

The results of the descriptive analysis of the data collected from fishermen in Jaya Bakti Village are presented in the following tables and explained narratively.

**Table 1. Age Distribution of Fisher Respondents (N=62)**

| Age | Quantity (f) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| 12-24 years old | 6 | 9,7 |
| 25-35 years old | 12 | 40,3 |
| >36 years old | 31 | 50,0 |
| Total | 62 | 100 |

*Respondent Desa Jaya Bakti, 2024*

Based on the analysis of age data from 62 respondents (see Table 1), it was determined that the population of fishermen is predominantly composed of adults and individuals in the advanced age group Increasing age within the working population is associated with a higher risk of low back pain, mainly due to cumulative occupational exposure and degenerative changes, rather than elderly status. The majority of respondents (50.0%) were over 36 years old, followed by the 25-35 years old age group (40.3%). The youngest age group (14-24 years) is a minority (9.7%).

**Table 2. Distribution of Fisher Respondents' Lifestyle (N=21)**

| Lifestyle Variables | Category | Quantity (f) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Smoking Status | Smoke | 19 | 90,5 |
| | No Smoking | 3 | 14,3 |
| | Total | 21 | 100 |
| Alcohol consumption | Drinking Alcohol | 8 | 38,1 |
| | Do Not Drink Alcohol | 13 | 61,9 |
| | Total | 21 | 100 |

(Note: The percentage of smoking 14.3% for 'No Smoking' should be 9.5% for a total of 100%, but following the original data 3/21 = 14.3%)

Lifestyle analysis conducted on a sub-sample of 21 respondents (Table 2) showed a very high prevalence of smoking (90.5%). Regarding alcohol consumption, most of the respondents in this sub-sample (61.9%) stated that they did not drink alcohol.

**Table 3. Distribution of Monthly Income of Fisher Respondents (N=41)**

| Revenue | Quantity (f) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| IDR 0 – 500.000 | 6 | 9,7 |
| IDR 500.000 – 1.000.000 | 12 | 40,3 |
| >IDR 1.000.000 | 31 | 50,0 |
| Total | 62 | 100 |

Monthly income data, analyzed from 41 respondents (Table 3), showed that most fishermen (63.4%) had an income between Rp 500,000 to Rp 1,000,000.

**Table 4. Distribution of Symptoms Participants in Fishermen with Back Pain (N=20)**

| Symptom questions | Answer yes (f) | Answer yes (%) | Answer no (f) | Answer no (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Does back pain radiate to the abdomen? | 12 | 60,0 | 8 | 40,0 |
| Experiencing loss of consciousness? | 17 | 85,0 | 3 | 15,0 |
| Experiencing Headache? | 18 | 90,0 | 2 | 10,0 |
| Are you confused? | 5 | 25,0 | 15 | 75,0 |

Information on comorbidity symptoms was collected specifically from 20 respondents who reported

experiencing back pain (Table 4). More than half (60%) reported pain radiating to the abdomen. The most frequently reported accompanying symptoms were headache (90%) and episodes suggestive of loss of consciousness or presyncope (85%). Confusion was reported by 25% of respondents in this group.

**Discussion**

This descriptive research provides an initial overview of the profile of coastal fishermen in Jaya Bakti Village who are associated with back pain. The age distribution of respondents, with the majority being in the adult and advanced age groups (>36 years), is consistent with the literature showing an increased risk of back pain with age.[2] Natural degenerative factors in the spine as well as years of accumulated exposure to physical work, such as lifting weights and awkward postures prevalent in the fishing profession, likely contribute to the prevalence of pain in this age group.[11]

The finding of a very high prevalence of smoking (90.5%) in the analyzed sub-sample is a significant aspect of lifestyle. The link between smoking and back pain, particularly chronic LBP, has been widely documented.[7,8] Mechanisms that may be involved include disruption of microcirculation to the intervertebral disc due to nicotine, increased inflammatory mediators, and increased intra-discal pressure due to chronic cough.[12] Although this analysis was based on a small sub-sample (N=21), the high number highlights the potential for smoking as a relevant risk factor in this population. The prevalence of alcohol consumption (38.1%) was lower, and its association with back pain was less consistent in the literature, although heavy consumption may affect general musculoskeletal health.[9]

The majority of fishermen in the income study sample (N=41) were in the lower-middle income group. Socioeconomic status is often correlated with health conditions, including musculoskeletal pain.[10] Lower incomes can limit access to healthcare, affect working conditions, nutritional status, and increase psychosocial stress, all of which can contribute to the risk or severity of back pain.[13]

Analysis of comorbidity symptoms in 20 fishermen who experienced back pain revealed an interesting clinical pattern. Pain that radiates to the abdomen/abdomen (60%) may indicate nerve root involvement (radiculopathy) or is referred pain of the spinal structure, requiring further diagnostic attention.[14] High comorbidities with headache (90%) are often observed in chronic pain patients and may involve mechanisms such as central sensitization, secondary muscle tension, or stress.[15,16]

The most unusual finding and requiring careful interpretation was the high number of reports of "loss of consciousness" (85%) associated with back pain. Syncope (fainting) is not a typical symptom of mechanical back pain. Potential explanations include vasovagal syncope due to severe pain, misinterpretation of the term by respondents (perhaps referring to presyncope or severe dizziness), or the presence of other underlying medical conditions.[17] Given this very high percentage, further clinical validation is essential to rule out serious pathologies or "red flags".[18] The confusion reported by 25% of

respondents could also be related to severe pain, medication side effects, or other factors associated with presyncope episodes.

Although not measured in detail, the employment context of fishers with exposure to vibration, weightlifting, and challenging work postures remains an important background that contributes to the risk of back pain in this population.[4,6] It is worth acknowledging the limitations of this study, including descriptive design, sample size variations, potential bias in self-report data, and ambiguity in the interpretation of symptom terms. In addition, important occupational and psychosocial variables are not measured in detail.[19]

## Conclusion

Descriptively, back pain among coastal fishermen in Jaya Bakti Village tends to occur in adult working-age groups, particularly those aged over 36 years, which may reflect cumulative occupational exposure rather than advanced age. A very prominent lifestyle factor is the high prevalence of smoking. Most fishermen have a lower-middle income level.

Among fishermen who experience back pain, the most common accompanying symptoms are headaches and pain radiating to the abdomen. The most notable finding requiring further attention is the high frequency of self-reported episodes suggestive of loss of consciousness or presyncope accompanying back pain. As these symptoms are atypical for mechanical low back pain, further clinical clarification and investigation are warranted to better understand their underlying causes in this population.

## Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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