

# Addressing the Voice of Women in Marine and Maritime Industry

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**Abstract:** Marine and maritime industry often have been acknowledged as male-dominated. Women represent nearly 2% of the workforce in the maritime community. Even though, the marine and maritime industry have been evolving throughout history, women's placement in it has not been notorious. Women are seldom neglected from the global industry for being family-committed and/ or being considered as weaker sex. Yet women play major roles in sustainable development hence they should be incorporated in ocean-based policy, governance and decision-making. Lower wages, gender disparity, discrimination on board, and harassment can encourage women to keep themselves away from the ocean. Institutions are trying to provide a fair recognition of women in the ocean-related jobs but still efforts are required. It is vital to reduce gender disparity in marine professions and to promote the involvement on women in ocean related diligences. Consistent efforts are required to seize the moment for acknowledgement, in terms of encouragement and support for closing the gender gap This paper aims to elaborate the concerns of gender equality in marine and maritime industry.

**Key words:** Women, Marine, Maritime, Gender equality, Male domination

## I. Introduction

Many women are dissuaded from participating in the male-dominated industries because of the lack of role models, stereotypes about women's nature of work, discouraging workplace culture and traditions within the organization. Carpentry, engineering, construction, driving, and so many other fields are still male centric. Marine and maritime sector is not an exception. Addressing gender equality and achieving women autonomy seems a daunting task, in spite of all the efforts carried out.

Maritime sector is one of the most internationally significant industry as it drives about 90% of the global trade and it provides a wide array of job opportunities for people who want to explore a different working environment with unlimited prospects of advancement (Aggrey, 2000). However, adventures are circumscribed to the male community. Marine related fields have been uniquely affected by gender biases

over the years (Gissi, Portman, & Hornidge, 2018). Maritime sector can be defined as nothing but a male-dominated industry, which denies the opportunity to be on board for women because of being 'woman'. The reason behind this could be the presence of social and cultural barriers impede and limit women contribution to the development of society. In addition, communities would not accept the idea of women in certain professions (Abdelall, 2008). Superstitions such as women would be a 'potential source of malevolence or bad luck' and folklores related to women's bad luck being on board have often kept their hands off ships and vessels. Such facts still remain among the fishing and seafaring communities (Zhao et al., 2017).

As women become empowered through active participation within these uncommon professions, their roles are likely to continue to change. It then becomes increasingly important to look beyond the simplistic view of women as housewives and incorporate women's experiences and knowledge into decision-making process (Cable, 2012). Literature often have considered the participation of women in maritime sector or women in board. Researches seldom acknowledged the voice of women in marine sector, which takes into account marine science, fisheries and aquaculture. This paper aims to confess the knowledge gap on women's participation and their potential roles in an evolving marine and maritime industry.

## II. Gender-specific profession?

The mission of merchant ship is to carry cargo from one port to another in a safe and efficient manner. Therefore, seafarers must live in mobile, isolated and residential workplaces for a long time; thus be away from the friends, families and partners (Guo, 2019). The life of a seafarer is tough because of the nature of work as well as social and emotional isolation; which was believed that women could not cope up hence they were not/less encouraged (Conference, 2014). In fact, expression of 'he', 'his' and 'him' can be seen in literatures. Further, even though there is a gender-neutral word 'seafarers', it is often annotated as 'seaman' which is gender specific (Kitada, 2013). The seafaring profession is highly mobile which allows seafarers to regularly move between ship and shore. These two spaces may have different gender norms and values which could pose a number of challenges to manage their identities (Caerdydd, 2010).

Women have different reasons why they choose a career at sea. Some have parents or other relatives that have been or in the maritime business which influences their choices. Some would choose it since the maritime business is global so that the work does not hold them in one place. Some women want to improve their lifestyles get a well-paid job and some appreciate the time off which comes with working at sea in combination with relatively high wages (Ståhl, 2018). While more women have been recruited to the merchant navy, mostly on cruise and passenger ships, since the beginning of the twentieth century, these women generally do not work in the maritime departments of the vessels; instead, they work mostly in service aspects (Guo & Liang, 2012). Further, women are an underutilized and available resource of maritime talent which the shipping sector needs to draw the balance upon to seafarer's shortfall (Jo, 2010).

On the other hand, fisheries industry, too, has been dominated by men; symbolized by the common terminology 'fishermen', and not 'fisherwoman'. Over the last decade stereotypes of women in fishing economies and communities have been challenged and more realistic views of their social and economic contributions have been offered (Skaptadóttir, 2000). There is a national and international understanding that if resource managers are to understand and develop strategies for coastal resilience, there is a need for a holistic approach that includes an understanding of the intersection between the dynamics of fisheries management and women's participation within fishing industry (Calhoun, Conway, & Russell, 2016).

At various times throughout the history, working women were viewed as immoral and unfeminine objects of pity. The society believed a woman's place was in her home, caring for her husband and children, often restricting their career choices. Factors narrowing women traditional role occupations included social and familial influences, lack of awareness regarding nontraditional options, an unwelcoming environment in many male-dominated sectors, discrimination with career fields, high turnover rates for women and less seniority in given occupations (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Yet the views of women's role in a workforce are changing throughout time. Women have entered the professions and career-oriented occupations in larger numbers since the 1960s (Evetts, 2000). Globally and across economic sectors, in spite of the significant progress already made in empowering women socially, economically and politically, achieving gender equality is recognized as a 'grindingly slow process' and barriers still exist blocking women from furthering their participation in decision-making process at family, community and state levels (Zhao, Tyzack, Anderson, & Onoakpovike, 2013).

### III. Women and Ocean

International Maritime Organization (IMO) found out that, women represent only 1-2% of the world's 1.25 million seafarers (Guo & Liang, 2012); (Abdelall, 2008); (Bhirugnath-bhookhun & Kitada, 2017). Of this, 94% of women are employed on passenger ships (68% on ferries and 26% on cruise ships) 6% on cargo vessels (Barbare & Academy, 2016). Yachts, fishing vessels and naval ships are not the same as merchant cargo ships in terms of their purposes of operations as well as their organizational structures. Thus it cannot be

expected to include women sailors since the experience is far more different from that of the cargo ships (Kitada, 2013). Literature repeatedly shows that seamen out there in the public space in the sea, being manful, valiant in contrast to women ashore in private domestic spaces, representing nurturing, finer rather than brutal values, fixity and unsuitability and/or inability to deal with that dangerous force of the sea (Stanley, 2000). So it becomes important to raise voice against the maritime sea-based industry lags when it comes to female participation.

Noteworthy developments have been taking place during the past decades. Women have restructured their labor market and lifestyles via upgrading their educational backgrounds which enables them into partake in male dominated sectors, even shipping industry (Theotokas, 2014). Cultural stereotypes have been altered women are actively engaging themselves into seafaring and maritime employments. Still, discriminations and hindrances from the society, limit them in doing so. Literature has mentioned women who choose shipping as a career find themselves "hitting glass ceilings" (Aggrey, 2000).

Career choices are different from those live in a developed country than of a developing country. The calculations mentioned by the IMO represents high degree of women from developed countries. Presence of social, cultural and religious barriers impedes and limit women's contribution to the development of the society and/or country (Abdelall, 2008). Since fewer women engage in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics fields, women are often regarded as being less capable than their male counterparts despite their potentials (McKinsey & Company, 2015). Women who manage to overcome the stereotypes are either discouraged or out-casted. To challenge such gender stereotypes and prove their competence at work, women managers' commitment to work is extremely high, comparative to men. While climbing the career ladder amidst the male-dominated work environments, it could be a disruption to perceive success in their personal life (Bhirugnath-bhookhun & Kitada, 2017).

### IV. Gender Disparity

"Women are undermined, misjudged, ill-treated and at times overprotected when they foray into a male-bastion. Mental readiness to tackle the adversities help women who make unusual careers" says Radhika Menon, one of few women in a leadership role in Merchant Navy and is the first woman to receive the IMO award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea in 2016 (Times of India, March 2020). Hegemonic masculinity is symbolically positioned in board ships within discourses that produce and reproduce gendered operation of work within the organizational culture, which could be problematic when women enter seafaring professions as their 'difference' may create an anarchic status quo within the ships (Kitada, 2016).

Gissi et al., 2018 argues that for an effective sustainability-focused ocean governance women are required for more moral and ethical reasons, to eliminate barriers for the participation of women in public decisions about the oceans. The population of women in seafaring and marine sciences is, however, still small, nevertheless they thrive to cope up with identity management at both sea and shore (Caerdydd, 2010). Women

still aspire in a maritime or marine career, despite of all struggles explained. Motivations and encouragement should shed lights on those who are willing to take a career in the sea, despite of nationality, race or age (Bruno, 2019). Many of the issues apply to women across all careers and are related to work-life balance and the consequences of having a family. However, there are specificities in a career in marine STEM that make it harder for women to succeed compared to other careers (Conference, 2014). Yet still women receive lower wages even though what they do is exactly similar to that of their male colleagues (Abdelall, 2008).

Maritime industry is often stated as the most stressful working environment. Studies have reported that there is an increased risk of high cholesterol, hypertension, neurosis, suicide and alcohol abuse; specially among seamen of lower rank (Agterberg & Passchier, 1998). This could be of a particular reason that maritime academy is not recommended to women since they cannot manage the stress. But studies have shown that, women are more capable of coping with stress and have a better physiological well-being (Sandeep Bhattacharjee & Parul Tripathi, 2012). The major issue for keeping them distracted is they are not adequately rewarded in terms of status of promotion in accordance with their ability and commitment in work (Suginraj, 2016). Another factor that keeps a barricade for women involvement is the sexual harassments taking place on board (M. A. Thomas, n.d.). However, despite of the field they are working, women are commonly harassed though out the world. Overcoming sexual harassment could be a burden as well as may slow down their career development.

The social contextual factors play an important role in the interpretation of socialization process and outcomes; yet under a male-dominated industry, women are shaped partly by their encounter with an unfriendly workplace and partly because of their systems of norms, expectations and experiences (Wu, Chen, Ye, & Ho, 2017).

## V. Women in marine industry – the future?

Since the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 5 aims to promote the gender equality, women have become amalgamated into social, political and economic agendas. Such that, IMO has suggested that the maritime industry have to aggressively develop women human resources (Guo, 2019). WMU and IMO is also taking actions to encourage the involvement of Pacific women into maritime transport sector and marine energy (Kitada & Mari, n.d.). Fair recognition of women's contribution to the maritime industry is considered by IMO via the launching of Integration of Women in the Maritime Sector (IWMS) program (Kitada, Piñeiro, & Jr, 2019). Education is high on the agenda for international bodies interested in closing the gender gap. Auspices of the IMO and WMU have been profoundly promoting the women to pursue marine-maritime education and consequently marine and maritime careers (MacNeil & Ghosh, 2017).

Organizational support (Wu et al., 2017) and healthy peer relationships (Turner, Suárez, & Aspinwall, 1970) are vital factors in building up women's career development in such an unwelcomed field of work. Pertinent to the issue of women as a potential resource to address the current and predicted future

shortage of qualified officers is the concern over possible retention rates. The perception of the primacy of the women's commitment to family should not be acknowledged in women's marginalization in workplace (M. Thomas, 2004). Separation from family could be addressed well as a barrier for women to enter the maritime industry, however whilst advances in the telecommunication technology could be seen as an advantageous step ahead for women seafarers (M. Thomas, Sampson, & Zhao, 2003). "Task prohibition according to sex" should be avoided so to avoid women being invisible or have forbidden to participate in activities of higher value (Wulansari, Mahawati, & Hartini, 2013).

All the women have their rights to choose the education and career they prefer. Roles of women in marine and maritime industry is clearly evolving and the potential of women's voices to contribute in these areas, particularly reaching sustainable goals, is rising. Yet consistent efforts are required to seize the moment for acknowledgement, in terms of encouragement and support for closing the gender gap.

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