

Women Seafarers: Solution to Shortage of Competent Officers?

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed to determine the participation of women in the seafaring profession. It also looked into the hiring practices of the different manning and shipping companies in the country. It also tackled the hindrances or obstacles a woman seafarer faces in a male dominated world like seafaring. This research utilized the interview approach in data-gathering among the crew managers, and an in-depth interview with a lone woman seafarer participant.

1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, women have always aimed for a recognized place in society. Society has prescribed that a woman's place is usually at home, taking care of the children. Many feminist movement forced the issue of women's rights to come into people's awareness. These frontrunners have helped redefine and consolidate the nature of women's contributions to society shows that progress has been made.

In today's society women have access to education and can promote themselves much more easily than in the seventies. Women's changing role is happening because women nowadays are educated.

For centuries, maritime history and literature have treated seafaring as a solely male domain. Although women have now begun to appear in maritime scholarships, they are mostly on the periphery. A few women have been recorded as having travelled as stewardesses, explorers, or companions to captains, but on the whole, women did not take part in the actual running of ships (Creighton and Norling, 1996; Stanley, 1987 in P. Belcher, 2003)

Women on boardships either served as children's nurses, stewardesses for women passengers and as laundresses.

It was only after 1945 when women were regularly recruited as stewardesses, cooks and radio officers. The first women cadets were recruited only in the late 60s.

Since the late 1990s there has been a growing interest in training and recruiting women seafarers. This is largely connected to perceived shortages of officers in the world fleet.

The latest Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO) and the International Shipping Federation (ISF) report suggests that the current shortfall of officers corresponds to 4 percent of the total (16,000 officers) and predicts a 12 percent shortfall by 2010, an estimated 46,000 officers.

As of 2006, the European Commission reported an estimated 36,000 officers shortfall from the 13,000 officers in 2001 (P. Belcher, et. al, 2004).

Owing to the fact that there is big shortage for officers to man the world's fleet, the focus now is on the possibility of recruiting more women into the maritime profession.

The United Nations promoting women's employment and the integration of women into all levels of political, economic, and social development the IMO produced a strategy for integrating women

into the maritime sector in 1988, when it began to implement its Women in Development (WID) programme concentrating on equal access to maritime training through both mainstream programmes and gender specific projects. One of the immediate impacts of the programme has been the rise in the percentage of women students taking part in the highest level of maritime training.

The SIRC/ILO survey in 1995 revealed that women made up of less than 8 percent in the total number of students at the World Maritime University. Overall, the participation rate of women in seafaring remains low. Only about 1 to 2 percent of the world's 1.25 million seafarers and that most of these women are from developed countries. The study by Belcher, et al.(2003) found out that women continue to constitute a very small part of labor force of seafarers. It is in this context that this study was conducted.

2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to determine the participation of women in the seafaring profession in the Philippines. Specifically, it aims to determine the following:

- 1 The number of Filipino women currently employed on board vessels;
- 2 Hiring practices and policies of the shipping companies in recruiting women for seafaring;
- 3 Reasons why some ship owners refuse to hire women on board ships

3 METHOD

This study employed the qualitative method of research utilizing the interview approach in gathering data. It aimed to determine the participation of women in the maritime profession. Likewise, it looked into hiring practices of the ship owners and it also intended to determine the reasons why many ship owners refuse to take or hire women in their company. The participants in this study are the shipping and manning companies and a woman seafarer who had been at sea and is now an officer.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Modes of analysis

On December 9-13, 2007 these group of researchers proceeded to Manila to conduct interviews with the different stakeholders in the maritime profession. The interview focused on different issues confronting the maritime profession. In the light of the many

issues on the shortage of officers, the women remain untapped as a possible source of the qualified seafarers. The first interviewee was Mrs. Virginia Linesis, the lady president of K-Line. She was quick in saying that as far as her company is concerned, they are not hiring women as seafarers in their company. She also told the group that Japanese culture does not allow women to work on board their vessels.

Capt. Jose De la Peña also shares the opinion of Mrs. Linesis and other ship manning managers with Japanese principals do not hire women seafarers.

C/M Erickson Pedrosa said his company, the Walllem Maritime Services are employing women in the company. He further said: "We have five (5) women cadets. This company is giving fair treatment to men and women. The entry of women in the profession will help in the shortage. However, women are weak emotionally and physically. They must be trained just like the men and be prepared for the job.

Capt. Jimmy Milano, the General Operations Manager of Inter-Orient Maritime Enterprises, Inc. said they don't employ women on cargo vessels, but they have at least two (2) women stewards in the company's pleasure yacht numbering about 14. Personally, though, he is against women employment on cargo vessels with mixed crew because it could sometimes spell trouble. But he is also in favor of hiring women on passenger vessels.

Capt. Rolando Ramos of Unisea, Philippines believed that women are capable of becoming officers and doing the work on board vessels, however because of our culture, women are easily tempted. The company does not discriminate women as a matter of fact, the company employs women.

3/M Glenna Juarez, a graduate of JBLFMU is now a licensed Third Officer. She sits as the Assistant Technical Marine Superintendent at UNISEA, Philippines, Inc. She believes that women are good in planning procedures and office work. Women are different in handling work on board. She adds "all the things we do are arranged. We have a system of doing things."

Asked if she would still continue life at sea despite the fact that she now holds a very comfortable and a very important position in the office, she smiled and said "Yes, for me it's not fulfilling that I have the 3rd Mate license but I did not have the chance to practice." The owner's representative made her choose between a land based and a sea-based position. The owners plan to put a junior third officer on board is a bit longer and for a while she opted to stay in the office because she also needs to know how the office runs, how the shipping is managed ashore. Asked how long does she intend to stay

on board. She said: "I don't want to stay on board all my life. It's difficult to stay on board."

When asked what makes life on board difficult for someone like her, she said: "I guess the environment, the weather. The bad weather, you cannot sleep because you are bothered by the rolling and pitching of the vessel. And also working with people on board, there are people who are mean! The entire working environment makes life on board difficult. She experienced 36 hours of no sleep because they have to finish the cargo hold cleaning, because after 6 o'clock we cannot discharge the cargoes. She also said: "There are times I wanted to go home because of the people on board." Even the people from the engine department would ask her why she joined the profession."

When asked how she was able to finish the one year contract on board, she mused: I have to prove that I can survive. The workload is not a problem, I guess because it's part of being a seafarer. To her, one must be aware that sleep on board is not the kind of sleep you are experiencing on land. To her, while you are sleeping your mind must be awake because what if there is an emergency. Alertness is always there. You cannot say that your sleep is a rest, you are still awake. For her, just one ring of the phone she is already awake. She needs to be always alert. There are also times its fun to be on board having the chance to visit other places. She also said that she is proud whenever the captain asks her to clean the bilge, the strum box or rose box.

Asked if she was able to apply what she learned in school, she was quick to say: "Yes. Especially navigation, it was more enhanced on board especially the skills. I guess you have to love your work in order to survive."

"During my free time, I just stayed in my room watching movies or sometimes talking with other crew members. Every time there are nasty jokes, I just listen or just ignored it. Sometimes, I simply get out of the room or cabin to avoid embarrassment or being offended by the conversation.

Asked what her job now is in the office; she said: "I am the Assistant Technical Superintendent. Together with the Technical Superintendent, we compose the Ship Management Team. It's a new team in the company; we have a counterpart in the main office in Greece. We visited the main office of UNISEA in Greece last October 2007. We observed how the office is run, how the office operates.

Here in the Philippines, 3/M Glenna also works in the administration department of manning. The Greek Director told her she is being prepared either as Human Resource Officer or Quality Management Representative in the office after her training on board and in the office.

Capt. Martinez believes that Filipino women are capable of being officers on board vessels. He believes that if there are Danish or British women officers, so can there be Filipinos. He believes that these women must learn to love this job, because it's a tough job.

Mrs. Brenda Panganiban, President of Bouvet Shipping Management, said she is in favor of women seafarers in the profession but only for a very limited time. This is because she will be getting married. European principals accept women in the profession but not in Japanese owned vessels. She also mentioned that women have different disposition when it comes to decision making. This opinion is also shared by the training manager of Maritime Corporation, Capt. Lexington Calumpang. According to him "women are for light work only. For the deck there is no problem because they are on the bridge, but in the engine their strength must be like that of the men. For theory women are good. In this company, hiring women is preparatory to office job after their training on board is completed. We have a woman superintendent from MAAP. She is now the safety environmental superintendent with a 4th engineer license. We have employed two women who just disembark; they were taken by the company two weeks after they have disembarked." He further stressed that on deck women are slow in decision making. They rattle. One woman was given penalty for a year; she is assigned at the office of the principal's representative in the training department for the meantime.

When asked if they have any policy requirement for women, they too, like men have to pass the admission exam, interview and the medical examinations. They also have to undergo training both in-house and in other training centers.

Women on board vessels are usually visited by the fleet manager to see to it that they are not victims of any form of harassment from the other crew. Women seafarers must perform just like the men, when they become a master mariner they can be assigned in the office.

When asked what her opinions are on women seafarers, Mrs. Carla Limcaoco, Executive Director and Vice-Chairman of Philippine Transmarine Carrier said: "First of all, these are issues of physical demands. Second, women will eventually fall in love, get married and get pregnant. But if they are focused and determined enough then there is no problem."

5 FINDINGS

- 1 Women seafarers in the seafaring profession are comprised of only 1-2 percent.

Most of these women are in the steward department although there are a few ship owners who are now hiring women as officers.

- 2 Not too many of the companies in the country today are hiring women to become officers. The companies hiring these women are actually preparing them for office positions. Women are more organized; hence they are more appropriate to work in the office after they have acquired the necessary training and knowledge of running a ship.
- 3 The women who are now taken as cadets and being prepared to become officers on board ships must be physically, emotionally and spiritually tough in order to overcome all kinds of hindrances, obstacles and challenges that may come their

way. They need to think and act properly in a profession that is male-dominated.

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