



LEVELS OF HURDLES FACED BY INDIAN WOMEN SEAFARERS ON BOARD MERCHANT SHIPS

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ABSTRACT- Maritime sector is one of the major contributors of global economy that carries International trade on its shoulders. Around 80 percent of global trade by volume and over 70 percent of global trade by value are carried by sea. Indian Shipping industry has been a fast growing industry and one of the major contributors, not only in monetary terms but also in giving employment to crew on national and international vessels. Indian Shipping industry is one of the industries which hired only male employees as sailors till few years back. Recently, women have been encouraged to join the wagon. Thousands of seafarers are employed on board out of which meagre 1% are Indian women seafarers. This is more alarming as leaving aside just a fraction of this percentage, majority of women seafarers are facing tremendous challenges on board. This study was carried out through survey method wherein a focus group of 198 respondents was chosen through purposive sampling. These included women seafarers of all age groups and ranks who have either sailed on or are presently sailing on merchant vessels or have taken up a shore job in shipping companies. Data was collected through direct closed ended and open ended questionnaire and structured interview method where respondents were asked about their demographic details and also about the various levels of hurdles faced by them on board. Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used for analysing the data. Study was carried out and results taken thereof, followed by suggestions that need immediate attention of the authorities.

KEYWORDS: Maritime, Indian Woman Seafarer, Hurdles, Ship

I. INTRODUCTION

Gone are the days when Indian women were behind veils and just confined to the four walls of their houses. Presently they are in big numbers in National Defence Forces viz. Army, Navy and Air Force and also in services like Indian Coast Guard, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force and like. Moreover their numbers are increasing in geometric progression in these arenas with each passing day. On the contrary, although their entry was given a green signal more than three decades before, Indian women sailors are still only 1% of the total sailors on merchant ships. Shipping is one of those very few industries which has low number of women workforce. Indirectly the potential human resource is not tapped fully, thus affecting the overall GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of our country. Blame it on the traditional mindset of the 'male dominated' industry or the lack of awareness, this paltry number of female seafarers clearly indicates that very little has been done to encourage women in opting and continuing seafaring careers. McKinsey Global Institute clarifies that to increase GDP, women and men barrier needs to reduce. If this happens then \$12 trillion could be added to GDP by 2025. Efforts are being made to increase the percentage of women in seafaring but sad to share that majority of these high performing girls/ladies have to compromise either on personal or professional front.

1.1. Who Is A Sailor ?

Sailor is a person who navigates ships or assists in the conduct, maintenance or service of ships. Sailor can be from deck side or engine side or catering department. He/She has to go through treacherous waters with lot of rolling and pitching often for long distances across vast oceans. Apart from touching coasts for loading or discharging of cargo (which at times can be for a couple of hours only), sailors are cut off from their families and the rest of the world as they sail from port to port. Generally, a contract is signed between the shipping company and the sailor which is for a particular tenure. Few companies also provide permanent employment.

1.2. When Was The Term 'Seaman' Replaced By The Term 'Seafarer' ?

Throughout in the history of merchant navy, only men were sent out to sea and hence the nomenclature 'seaman'. The word 'seaman' was replaced only in 2005 at the 294th session of the International Labour Organization (ILO) where the phrase 'seafarer' was invented to make the sailors a gender-terminology (Dr. Emil Mathew, 2015)

1.3. When Were They Taken In As Sailors?

Women were taken in as sailors around three decades before. Many girls tried to venture in this niche career. Only a few women were able to continue and reach to the top. Many either quit because of personal issues or family pressures or professional challenges. Another bitter truth is that there are many management companies or shipowners who consider women seafarers as a liability on board.

1.4. Where Do They Generally Hail From?

Women seafarers come from all parts of India, whether metropolitan cities or small towns and villages. Land of origin or language is not a barrier to these highly motivated girls of our country. Not only do they perform well on Indian flag vessels but also on foreign flag vessels.

1.5. They Sail On Which Types Of Ships?

Like any other seamen or male officers, women crew and officers also sail on ships that include Bulk Carriers, Containers, Tankers (viz. Oil Tankers, Chemical Tankers and Gas Tankers), Passenger Ships, Off shore Supply Vessels, Tug boats and Barges. These can be Indian flag ships or foreign flag ships.

1.6. Which All Ranks Do They Reach To?

Adjustment in all circumstances is a very prominent characteristic of Indian women. Same holds true to our women seafarers. Taking instructions or giving instructions is something that paves a way ahead for them. Ranging from Trainee Marine Engineer to Chief Engineer, Deck Cadet to Captain and later taking up leadership roles as Technical Superintendents, Marine Superintendents, Marine Surveyors and Pilots. Given the right opportunity and support, women seafarers are capable of reaching the skies.

1.7. Few Prominent Names Amongst Indian Women Seafarers

Indian women seafarers who created history and made our country proud are Capt. Radhika Me-non, Ms. Suneeti Bala,, Ms. Sonali Banerjee, Ms. Sharvani Mishra, Ms. Rupali Joshi, Ms. Bhagyashree Ogale, Ms. Reshma Nilofer, Ms. Poonam Devangan to name a few.

1.8 Organisations Which Support Women Seafarers

- * IMO - International Maritime Organization
- * The Directorate General of Shipping, India
- * IWSF - International Women Seafarer's Foundation
- * MUI-WW - The Maritime Union of India - Women's Wing
- * iCALL in association with Tata Institute of Social Sciences
- * NUSI - National Union of Seafarers of India
- * WISTA - Women's International Shipping and Trading Association
- * ISWAN - International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network

II. GENUINE HURDLES FACED BY WOMEN SEAFARERS

2.1. Difficulty In Fitting In The Male Dominated Shipping Industry

2.2. Accommodation On Board Is Not Always Women Friendly

2.3. Biased Opinion Against Women

2.4. Medical Challenges On Board

2.5. Sexual Harassment On Board

2.6. Always Being Watched By Hawk Eyes

2.7. Loneliness On Board

2.8. Sense Of Insecurity Amongst Family Members

- 2.9. Difficulty In Getting Promoted
- 2.10. Difficulty In Performing Certain Physical Jobs On Board
- 2.11. Subject Of Judgement At All Levels Of Work
- 2.12. Finding An Understanding Life Partner Is A Challenge
- 2.13. Women Seafarers Are In Double Minds Whether They Can Continue Their Career After Marriage
- 2.14. Even Though Hardly Any Wives Are On Board, Their Support Is Not Always Available
- 2.15. Not All Co-officers On Board Understand The Plight Of Women Seafarers
- 2.16. Lack Of Proper Briefing At The Training Level
- 2.17. Lack Of Motivation Amongst Women Seafarers To Continue
- 2.18. Grievance Cells Are Not Having Lady Counsellors With A Sailing Background To Understand From Women's Angle
- 2.19. To Prove Themselves, Women Seafarers Have To Work Harder As Compared To Their Male Counterparts
- 2.20. Working With Colleagues Having Different Mindset/Background Related To Social, Moral And Work Culture Is A Challenge
- 2.21. Odd Working Hours In Engine Room With Only One Man And Also During Darkness On Bridge
- 2.22. During Sign-on And Sign-off Staying In Hotels And Joining At Anchorage In Boat At Night Time Is A Challenge
- 2.23. Seniors Avoid Training Them On Board As They Are Scared Of Unnecessary Gossip From Co-workers
- 2.24. Sailing In Piracy Areas Creates Pressure On Sailing Woman, Co-officers And Also The Company

NEED OF THE STUDY

Apart from lot of push factors for women seafarers, still there are a number of hurdles which they are facing. Hence the need of the study.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Main objective of this study is to highlight major obstacles faced by women seafarers on board merchant vessels. Suggestions put forth should be looked into quite seriously by decision making bodies like Director General of Shipping, Shipping Ministry of India and Shipping companies. Efforts should be made to implement these so as to make life comfortable for women seafarers and also to replenish shortage of qualified and competent human resource through them.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Momoko Kitada (2019) in the Chapter 'Women Seafarers: An Analysis of Barriers to Their Employment' in the book 'The World Of The Seafarer - Qualitative Accounts of Working in the Global Shipping Industry' has mentioned about women seafarers as a future potential in mitigating crew shortages. She has mainly highlighted gender segregation in seafaring occupations, occupational culture and barriers for

women seafarers, lack of awareness and knowledge about women at sea and slow development of effective policies and strategies for them.

She has also mentioned on how masculine values and norms are evident in the occupational culture of seafaring where sexual harassment can be triggered towards a lone woman seafarer. According to her, security and health issues are often a matter of great concern. She even points out that very little research has been conducted in the area of employment policies for women seafarers. In her analysis, M. Kitada discusses the problems faced by women seafarers but has no practical solutions for these problems.

Anchal Kapoor et al. (2020) in their study have done a generalised analysis using secondary data from The Mckinsey Global Institute to highlight the percentage of GDP contribution via women workforce. They also used Cristina Dragomir's study of 2013 to write about problems most likely to happen to women in maritime career which again is a secondary source of data. According to their analysis, various reasons for women seafarers to quit their sailing jobs were following: better opportunities ashore, family problems, getting bored and retirement. They have not suggested anything concrete to overcome the issues faced by women seafarers.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out through survey method wherein a focus group of 198 respondents was chosen through purposive non-probability sampling. These included women seafarers of all age groups and ranks who have either sailed on or are presently sailing on merchant vessels or have taken up a shore job in shipping companies. Data was collected through direct closed ended and open ended questionnaire and structured interview method where respondents were asked about their demographic details and also about the various levels of hurdles faced by them on board. Analysis was done using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) technique. It is an attempt to highlight the various levels of barriers in the professional life of these women.

V. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

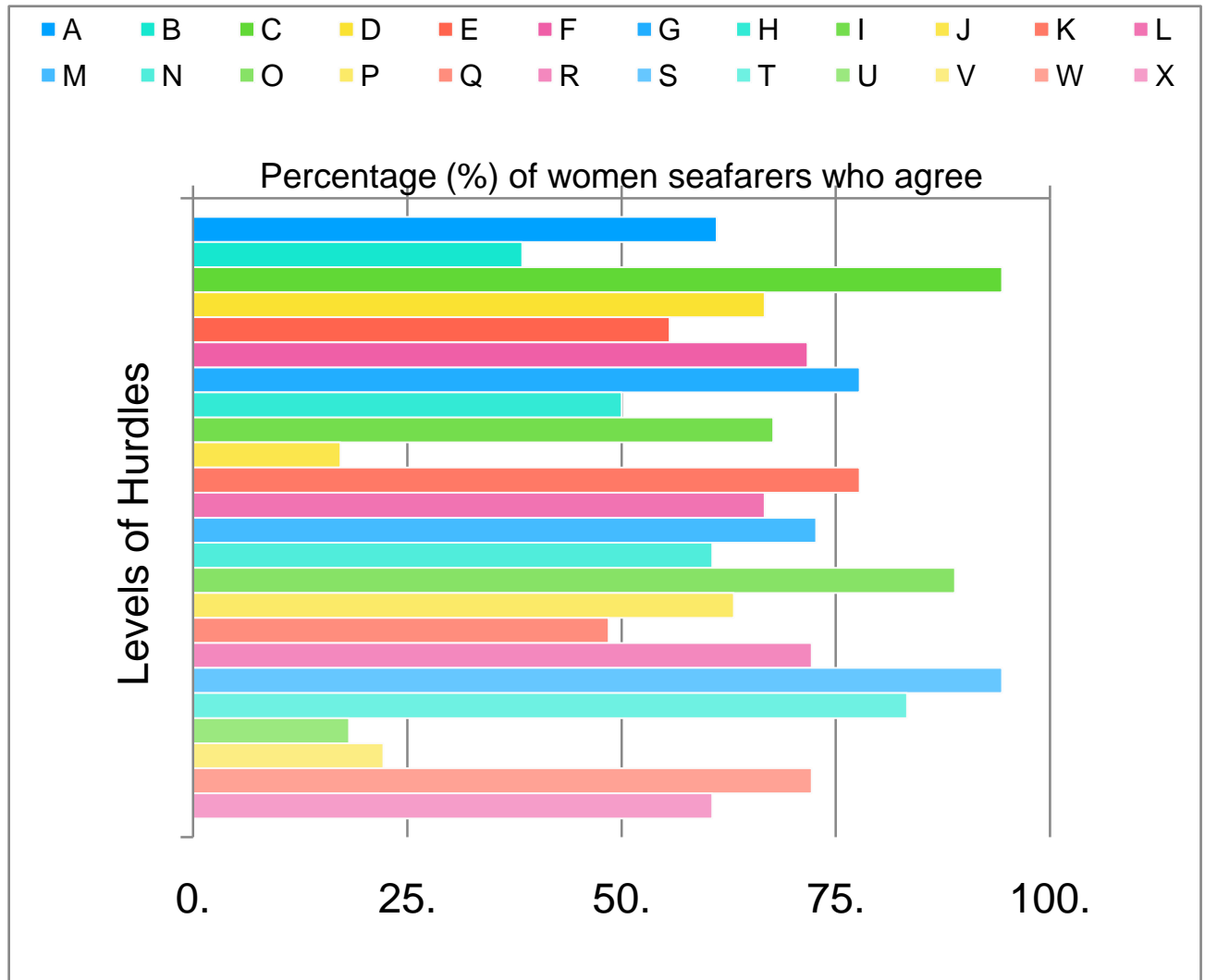
LEVELS OF HURDLES FACED BY INDIAN WOMEN SEAFARERS ON BOARD

LEVELS OF HURDLES	NO. WHO AGREE	% WHO AGREE
A. Difficulty In Fitting In The Male Dominated Industry	121	61.1%
B. Accommodation On Board Is Not Always Women Friendly	76	38.4%
C. Biased Opinion Against Women	187	94.4%
D. Medical Challenges On Board	132	66.7%
E. Sexual Harassment On Board	110	55.6%
F. Always Being Watched By Hawk Eyes	142	71.7%
G. Loneliness On Board	154	77.8%
H. Sense Of Insecurity Amongst Family Members	99	50%
I. Difficulty In Getting Promoted	134	67.7%
J. Difficulty In Performing Certain Physical Jobs On Board	34	17.2%
K. Subject Of Judgement At All Levels Of Work	154	77.8%
L. Finding An Understanding Life Partner Is A Challenge	132	66.7%

LEVELS OF HURDLES	NO. WHO AGREE	% WHO AGREE
M. Women Seafarers Are In Double Minds Whether They Can Continue Their Career After Marriage	144	72.7%
N. Even Though Hardly Any Wives Are On Board, Their Support Is Not Always Available	120	60.6%
O. Not All Co-officers On Board Understand The Plight Of Women Seafarers	176	88.9%
P. Lack Of Proper Briefing At The Training Level	125	63.1%
Q. Lack Of Motivation Amongst Women Seafarers To Continue	96	48.5%
R. Grievance Cells Are Not Having Lady Counsellors With A Sailing Background To Understand From Women's Angle	143	72.2%
S. To Prove Themselves, Women Seafarers Have To Work Harder As Compared To Their Male Counterparts	187	94.4%
T. Working With Colleagues Having Different Mindset/Background Related To Social, Moral And Work Culture Is A Challenge	165	83.3%
U. Odd Working Hours In Engine Room With Only One Man And Also During Darkness On Bridge	36	18.2%
V. During Sign-on And Sign-off Staying In Hotels And Joining At Anchorage In Boat At Night Time Is A Challenge	44	22.2%
W. Seniors Avoid Training Them On Board As They Are Scared Of Unnecessary Gossip From Co-workers	143	72.2%
X. Sailing In Piracy Areas Creates Pressure On Sailing Woman, Co-officers And Also The Company	120	60.6%

Note: Sample Size = 198

From the above findings through the table and histogram it can be observed and inference drawn that apart from just three levels of hurdles faced by the sample which they feel is not so great an obstacle for their professional growth, rest all 21 levels of hurdles identified are agreed upon by more than 40% of the chosen sample. Majority are agreed upon by more than 60% and few by more than 90% as well which is a matter of great concern.



VI. CONCLUSION

Conclusion drawn on this study is that although shipping industry is talking of women empowerment and trying their best to encash this untapped form of human resource, efforts have to be made to welcome these girls with open arms by giving them an understanding, comfortable and conducive working environment in order to get the best out of them. Women seafarers should also have lot of patience as it takes time for any system to accept anything new.

SUGGESTIONS

- 1) The male dominated shipping industry should welcome woman seafarer as any other employee and not an odd one out. Most of the females are not looking for sympathy. They love their job like any other male counterpart.
- 2) Shipping companies should be more open to recruiting female seafarers and not dismissing them based on gender or considering them a liability. The way shipping industry is growing, female seafarers should always be treated as a potential human resource.

3) There should be at least 60 hours or 1 month of rigorous training of 'MARTIAL ARTS' for women in their training curriculum.

4) All new recruits (men and women) passing out of training academy should also be trained on the grounds of

- a) Life Skills or psychosocial competency
- b) Personality Development
- c) Communication skills
- d) Officer-like qualities

For these, practical training should be imparted through role plays and case studies by experienced faculty.

5) First ship of every woman seafarer should preferably be allotted where already one senior woman is sailing. This way, the new woman recruit can get hands-on experience.

6) Shipping companies should try and send at least two female seafarers together on one ship.

7) Grievance cells should be provided in all companies' offices having lady counsellors with a sailing experience. Women on board should have a direct access to these counsellors.

8) Women seafarers joining the vessel should be highly motivated to continue sailing. They should understand that they are not only an asset to their company but also because this career is quite lucrative with regards to monetary and growth prospect.

9) There should be sufficient medical supplies and sanitary pads for women seafarers. They cannot carry enough in their luggage for long voyages. Moreover, there should be a way of disposing them off too.

10) Women seafarers should be given at least two months break between two contracts. This way they shall be able to spend time with their family.

11) Ship management companies and Unions should not showcase this gender as their advertising tool.

12) Male crew members should be briefed properly, especially those who have never sailed with a woman seafarer on board earlier. Their mindset has to be changed. Before joining any ship, they should be asked to do short 1 or 2 day gender sensitisation course.

13) Wives of officers on ships should also be asked to give a shoulder to these women seafarers in the time of need.

14) Male crew members, if they are not able to encourage and support these brave girls, at least they should not judge them or treat them as a subject of gossip on board. They have no right to demotivate women seafarers for their choice of this career.

WHAT THE PIONEERS HAVE TO SUGGEST YOUNG WOMEN SEAFARERS

a) Capt. Radhika MC Menon - Young women seafarers have lot of energy which they should channelise in a positive manner. Capt. Menon helps them to streamline their thoughts to focus on their career. She also helps them with everything, including their personal issues. According to her it is always good to have a hobby. In her free time she likes to observe the vast deep seas and oceans, listening to music and does photography on board.

b) Ms. Sonali Banerjee (Chief Engineer) - Women seafarers should understand that shipping career is not like any corporate job. It is tough and demanding, both physically and mentally. They should consider themselves as a professional and not like any privileged gender. They need not take long breaks on health grounds. They ought to spread positivity and bond well with their peers on board. According to her, writing is a wonderful hobby that helps to destress and is therapeutic at times.

c) Ms. Suneeti Bala (Chief Engineer) - Sailing career is quite promising and paying. The best thing according to her is the kind of confidence building and sense of responsibility it brings in sailors. Ms. Bala loved to play instruments, watching movies, reading, doing exercise/yoga.

d) Ms. Sharvani Mishra (Chief Engineer) - Seafaring is a highly rewarding and satisfying career, infact one of the best for ladies as it allows quick professional growth and opens door for job opportunities ashore. According to her, for having a balanced family life, planning needs to be done well and right steps should be taken at the right time. She preferred reading books at junior ranks. She even suggested that being decently social, practising welding and at times cooking too kept her engaged in her free hours.

e) Ms. Reshma Nilofer (Pilot) - Women seafarers should never underestimate their capabilities. Most often when they try something they thought was impossible, they would be left surprised at what they could actually achieve. In her free time she likes listening to music on board. It calms her, soothes her nerves and motivates her when she feels low. She is also learning Tai Chi.

Rightly quoted by Kitack Lim, Secretary General of the International Maritime Organization
"It's not about your gender, it's about what you can do"

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