

Navigating Beyond Boundaries: A Qualitative Inquiry on the Experiences of Women Seafarers in a Male-Dominated Maritime Industry

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation in seafaring continues to be shaped by the challenges of working within a traditionally male-dominated maritime industry. This study explored the experiences of women seafarers, particularly their motivations for entering the profession, challenges encountered at sea, professional development, coping strategies, support systems, and contributions to the maritime workplace. The findings revealed four major themes: Entering and Navigating a Male-Dominated Profession; Establishing Professional Legitimacy Through Competence; Resilience, Coping, and Support at Sea; and From Individual Achievement to Institutional Inclusion. Participants were motivated by economic stability, career development, family aspirations, international exposure, personal independence, and interest in maritime work. Despite these motivations, they experienced gender stereotyping, discrimination, unequal opportunities, recruitment and deployment difficulties, and practical workplace barriers. Nevertheless, participants established professional legitimacy through competence, reliability, professionalism, leadership, and technical performance. Their experiences also demonstrated that resilience developed through exposure to challenges and was strengthened by family, peers, mentors, crewmates, and organizational support. The findings further showed that women contribute significantly to maritime operations through technical competence, safety consciousness, teamwork, communication, leadership, and diverse perspectives. Overall, the study indicates that women's successful participation in seafaring requires more than individual resilience and competence. Sustainable inclusion requires institutional changes that promote gender equality, fair career opportunities, mentoring, appropriate workplace facilities, effective protection from discrimination and harassment, and psychosocial support. The participants' experiences ultimately position women seafarers as professionals and role models capable of contributing to a more inclusive maritime industry.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Institutional Inclusion, Maritime Industry, Professional Competence, Women Seafarers.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The maritime industry plays a vital role in global commerce and economic development, transporting more than 80% of international goods through shipping routes. It also provides significant employment opportunities that enable seafarers to improve their income and quality of life (Prince, 2025). Despite its importance, the industry remains one of the most male-dominated sectors worldwide, with women comprising only 1–2% of the global seafaring workforce (Huelar & Torib, 2024). Although international organizations and shipping companies continue to promote gender diversity, women remain significantly underrepresented, particularly in technical and leadership positions. Most women at sea are employed in passenger and hospitality services, while only a

few occupy deck and engineering roles (Zimmermann, 2026). These gender disparities highlight the need to examine the experiences of women in this traditionally male-oriented profession to better understand the challenges they encounter and identify strategies for improving workplace inclusivity (Institute of Developing Economies, 2025).

In the Philippines, the number of women pursuing maritime education and careers at sea has gradually increased. However, women remain underrepresented in onboard positions and continue to experience limited institutional support within the maritime industry (DMW-NMP, 2024). Furthermore, only a few shipping companies and crewing agencies have implemented formal gender-equity policies to address discrimination and promote inclusive workplaces (Baldonado & Espiritu, 2024). These conditions indicate that, despite expanding educational and employment opportunities, persistent societal attitudes and structural barriers continue to shape the experiences of Filipino women in maritime settings.

Life at sea is characterized by long working hours, physically demanding tasks, and prolonged separation from families (OneCare Group, 2025). For women, these conditions are often intensified because they are frequently the only female members of predominantly male crews. Consequently, many experience social isolation, loneliness, safety concerns, and challenges in establishing a sense of belonging aboard ships (The Seafarers' Charity, 2026). Understanding these realities provides valuable insights into how women navigate and adapt to the demands of shipboard life.

Despite these challenges, women seafarers continue to demonstrate resilience through professional competence, personal determination, peer support, regular communication with their families, and continuous self-improvement (Sangalang & Sebastian, 2025). These coping strategies enable them to remain committed and productive despite workplace adversities. Examining these lived experiences can guide the development of gender-responsive welfare programs, institutional support systems, and policies that foster equality and inclusion within the maritime industry (Abadicio et al., 2025).

As the global maritime industry continues to advocate for diversity and inclusion, understanding the lived experiences of women seafarers has become increasingly important. Their experiences can inform the formulation of equitable policies, improve working conditions, and strengthen institutional support systems (DMW-NMP, 2024). Given that the Philippines is one of the world's leading suppliers of seafarers, exploring the lived experiences of Filipino women seafarers is both timely and significant in promoting a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable maritime workforce.

Statement of the Problem

This narrative inquiry aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of women seafarers working in the maritime industry. Particularly, it aimed to explore their motivations, challenges, and coping mechanisms, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable maritime industry while offering valuable insights for aspiring women seafarers and students interested in maritime education.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

Entering and Navigating a Male-Dominated Profession

Motivations for Entering Seafaring

Sailing is perceived as a career path offering a lot of economic, professional, and personal benefits. There are financial gains, foreign mobility, professional growth, as well as chances to explore various cultures and surroundings. These aspects are appealing for people who want to improve professionally and socially. The future success and opportunities in a chosen career field may play an important role when choosing maritime studies for maritime students and potential seafarers (Mendoza et al., 2024).

Career motivation for women becomes especially relevant since engaging in seafaring means breaking through gendered occupational norms. Economic independence, the need to provide for one's family, career growth, job satisfaction, and personal growth are the reasons why women choose their professions. According to Baldonado and Espiritu (2024), Filipino women working at sea see their job as an opportunity to gain financial independence and personal and professional growth despite challenges associated with their gender role. The International Maritime Organization (IMO, 2025) states that growing job opportunities, competitive salaries, and increased inclusivity might act as motivating factors for women to engage in maritime occupations.

Persistence is also influenced by motivation. People who find their job to be a meaningful one that reflects their objectives have greater chances of developing the necessary perseverance and flexibility to cope with difficult work situations. In the context of the maritime industry, motivation may thus act as a critical base for building career commitment among women entering a traditionally male-dominated profession.

Gender-Based Barriers and Challenges

However, there is an observable shortage of female crew despite growing employment prospects. In the BIMCO/ICS Seafarer Workforce Report, the participation of women in the world seafarer population has been estimated to be around 1.2%, and in the Philippines, women still make up only a negligible percentage of Filipino seafarers who mostly serve in a support capacity rather than an operational one (International Maritime Organization, 2026; National Maritime Polytechnic, 2024; Tangi, 2022).

This lack of female representation is a result of structural and cultural challenges. According to ITF Seafarers (2026), lack of awareness about the career paths in the maritime industry for women presents a challenge for the recruitment of women. In situations where women have little exposure to the maritime sector due to influence from family members, school institutions, and career counseling, they might find themselves not pursuing seafaring as a career. The stereotypical view that seafaring is a man's job makes this inequality even worse.

Gender-related obstacles remain an issue within the workplace. The maritime sector has a male-dominated working environment; a lack of gender-responsive facilities, discrimination, harassment, and myths about the capabilities of women's strength and skills may negatively impact the experience of women on board ships. According to Justesen (2024), women sailors may face insecurity in a male-dominated workplace, which includes harassment. This situation may force women to build psychological toughness alongside proving their professionalism.

The IMO-WISTA Women in Maritime Survey 2024 also reveals further how the gender disparity still exists. In organizations participating in the study, women constituted merely 1% of all seafarers employed, and there were problems with recruitment, promotion, and support at work (IMO-WISTA, 2024). This clearly demonstrates how the engagement of women in seafaring should not be considered separately from the structure of institutions and culture that facilitate access to maritime education, recruitment, employment, and career development, and employment.

The gender barriers may overlap with those that generally accompany shipboard living. Long hours of work, physical exertion, long periods away from one's family, isolation, and an uncertain environment are typical elements of the life of a seafarer. Physical and psychological challenges of spending long periods on board are stressed by Hapag-Lloyd (2024) and ITF Seafarers (2026), while the need for faith and individual coping strategies is noted by Abucay (2023).

Hence, women who are trying to get into a maritime career are faced with two overlapping situations: one is the inherent challenges that exist within the field of seafaring, while the other is the extra challenges posed by being in a male-dominated industry.

Establishing Professional Legitimacy Through Competence

Professional Responsibilities and Shipboard Life

Tasks performed at sea demand highly controlled technical and operational duties from seafarers. The duties entail navigation, watch-keeping, handling of cargo, emergency responses, safety procedures, documentation, maintenance, and abiding by maritime law regulations. This entails technical skills, discipline, teamwork, communication, decision-making, and flexibility. Complexity and technological developments in the maritime industry highlight the need for professionalism even more.

The role of women seafarers in the demonstration of competence takes greater importance since women's abilities can be evaluated in contexts where gender stereotypes have significance. Literature shows that professional legitimacy is increased when women receive equal chances to carry out technical duties, take responsibility, be involved in decision-making, and exhibit leadership qualities. According to Johannesen et al. (2022), women can gain professional recognition through licensing, successful accomplishment of technical tasks, positive appraisals, responsibility, promotion, leadership, and good teamwork.

Sailing could also be helpful for professional growth. Narayanan et al. (2023) point out that sea-based occupations can offer international exposure, monetary gains, teamwork skills, problem-solving abilities, and the ability to cope with difficult situations. This is how sailing under difficult conditions could improve an individual's self-discipline, adaptability, and perseverance.

Recognition Through Competence and Performance

Competence and performance offer important elements to be recognized as professionals. Competence in competency-based maritime systems, such as the STCW scheme, is achieved through adequate certification, licensing, training, and the capability to carry out all the necessary duties on board independently. The International Maritime Organization (2023) stresses that for fair recognition, there should be equal opportunities for training and competency-based tests, which will allow seafarers to show their skills.

The performance-based recognition may include safe and efficient work, reliability, cooperation, adherence to standards, and achievement of more complicated tasks. According to the International Labor Organization (2025), objective performance evaluation is one of the key elements of fair recognition, especially for male-dominated professions. BIMCO (2026) also highlights the importance of performance to get promoted, especially if the person shows leadership qualities and the capacity to make decisions.

However, for women mariners, competence may also hold another level of significance since competence could be employed as a tool for debunking myths about women's physical capability, technical competency, and potential for leadership roles. SAFETY4SEA (2026) explains that competence will become obvious only when women have an equal opportunity to train and be responsible for work and assessed by real performance and not by presumptions based on gender.

Moreover, according to Johannesen et al. (2022), professionalism may arise from the fact that women prove to be as competent as men technically, receive good evaluations, take on more challenging tasks, become supervisors, engage in leadership development, and take part in teamwork and conflict management. Hence, professionalism does not only imply holding a job in the maritime field; professionalism is achieved through repeated demonstration of competence, reliability, responsibility, and leadership.

Redefining Gender Roles

From the literature, there appears to be a move away from gender stereotyping in favor of merit. This is due to the increasing involvement of women in the technical, operational, and managerial roles which have traditionally been associated with males. Hence, the increasing involvement of women calls into question the notion of maritime occupations being traditionally masculine.

As stated by Johannesen et al. (2022), a revolutionary change in maritime culture is needed to realize gender equality, whereas Kitada (2026) stresses gender mainstreaming as a means of redressing the structural injustices in the maritime industry. There is a need for a gender inclusive maritime profession in which there should be opportunities for training, employment, advancement, and leadership based on competence.

A gender-friendly and safe working environment is thus crucial. The IMO-Norway SENSREC Project (2024) notes the need for gender-sensitive working environments, and the FAO-UN (2024) stresses the need for inclusive policies, equal opportunities, gender-sensitive training, and anti-discrimination policies. From the above, it can be noted that the redefinition of gender roles involves not only personal but also institutional shifts.

Resilience, Coping, and Support at Sea

Personal Growth and Empowerment

There are many personal and professional development prospects available in the seafaring profession; however, the process is associated with physical, emotional, and social issues. Female seafarers may gain independence, confidence, flexibility, decision-making skills, and resilience as they learn to cope with harsh conditions on board ships.

According to the literature, resilience is a critical quality of women who work in a male-dominated environment at sea. As stated by Justesen (2024), female seafarers may experience a lack of security and harassment; moreover, resilience is an important characteristic of Filipina seafarers because of the challenges they face on board.

Professional development and empowerment have a lot to do with education, training, mentoring, welfare, and upward mobility. According to Sangalang and Sebastian (2025), appropriate accommodations, sanitation, healthcare, and maternity benefits are important; and Kitada (2026) insists on a gender-sensitive approach that will improve women's training, visibility, recognition, and leadership prospects.

Thus, resilience cannot be considered solely as individual ability to withstand hardships because it is built socially and institutionally. Women can develop their resilience with experience and personal growth, yet their ability to stay in and advance in the industry also depends on what they get from maritime organizations.

Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms help seafarers handle their emotional stress, anxiety, feelings of loneliness, and many other difficulties encountered during their working lives on ships. Saxena (2023) defines coping as an individual's ability to cope with challenging emotions and stress while retaining their psychological health.

Several coping mechanisms utilized by seafarers were identified in scientific literature cited in the manuscript. Mendoza et al. (2021) indicated that positive reinforcement, self-improvement, and laughter can be used as emotion-focused coping mechanisms. Abadicio et al. (2025) noted the use of video calls, internet connections, social interactions with colleagues, recreational activities, and developing mental toughness. Widiarti (2023) highlights the interaction between one's own capabilities, supportive resources, and recovery from stress.

Literature highlights the negative effects of prolonged separation from family and limited socialization. According to Tate (2025), loneliness is another issue faced by seafarers since they spend prolonged time away from their families, which can cause various problems such as stress, depression, anxiety, and other psychological issues. Brooks and Greenberg (2022) also highlight the issue of the well-being and psychological well-being of seafarers based on their systematic review.

The workplace can be another factor affecting the well-being of seafarers. According to Hayes-Mejia and Stafström (2024), the well-being and happiness of seafarers have some connection with the work environment, and the workload has an impact on their relationship.

Family, Peer, Spiritual, and Organizational Support

Social support is another significant element of coping and resilience. Family social support creates emotional bonds during long absences from home, while the availability of social support from fellow crew members helps to prevent isolation and adapt to shipboard life. Modern communication technologies have thus become increasingly vital for maintaining social support and contact during voyages.

Abadicio et al. (2025) state that seafarers utilize online communication, interaction with shipmates, recreation, and other approaches in managing mental health issues. Similarly, Widiarti (2023) focuses on the interplay between personal qualities, available sources of social support, and overcoming stress. Pagana et al. (2021) found that family social support is related to work-life balance, and seafarers utilize communication, mental, and physical exercises, among others, in coping with their situation.

In addition, spirituality might serve as a source of psychological resilience as well. Abucay (2023) states that believing in God could help seafarers to handle problems and to keep their minds clear and healthy during their time at sea. Hence, one might state that the resilience of female seafarers may be associated with multiple factors, including psychological, social, physical, and spiritual ones.

Another crucial element in handling occupational stress experienced by seafarers is organizational support. It includes a supportive work environment, good communication, resources for mental health, proper facilities, mentoring, and responsible leadership. From that point of view, literature proves that resilience should be institutionalized, not an individual matter.

From Individual Achievement to Institutional Inclusion

Women's Contributions to the Maritime Workplace

Women's presence in maritime employment goes beyond mere numbers. Women bring about technical know-how, professionalism, communication skills, attention to detail, teamwork, empathy, leadership qualities, and positive interpersonal relations. Research shows that women have something to offer in terms of operational, technical, managerial, and organizational aspects of the job.

The presence of women in the workforce may diversify perspectives on decision-making and bring about diversity in organizational culture. The surveys conducted by IMO-WISTA and Kitada (2026) show the necessity for greater efforts in recruiting and retaining, mentoring, and developing leadership qualities of women.

The latest debates on the subject have also shown that women are getting involved in new fields within the maritime industry, such as environmental, social, and governance initiatives and decarbonization efforts, thus demonstrating that there is room for expanding women's involvement outside of conventional maritime activities (Lloyd's List, 2025; MarineLink, 2025).

This research thus provides evidence for the move from seeing women as underrepresented employees who should be accommodated to viewing them as valuable contributors to the maritime industry.

Recommendations for Industry Improvement

To achieve true gender inclusiveness, some structural and institutional changes are necessary. Literature indicates some areas which require attention, such as recruitment, work environment, anti-discrimination measures, career progression, mentoring, leadership development, appropriate facilities, and mental well-being.

IMO-WISTA (2024) highlights the significance of recruitment, retention, mentoring, leadership development, and workplace environment. Kitada (2026) also supports the need for gender mainstreaming and intervention to overcome the gender inequalities in the industry.

Facilities and policies that are gender-specific are also very important. Literature stresses the importance of having appropriate facilities for the seagoing environment (Sangalang & Sebastian, 2025).

Institutional inclusion also entails the removal of stereotypes and establishment of a safe work environment. According to the IMO-Norway SENSREC Project (2024), an institution should have gender-inclusive workplaces, while the FAO-UN (2024) sees equal opportunities, gender-sensitivity training and anti-discrimination policies as mechanisms that promote equality. Spinnaker (2024) is concerned about gender-neutral talent development.

Representation and visibility are more mechanisms for institutional change. For women to become visible, they must be not only sailors but also captains, chief engineers, technical officers, managers and maritime leaders. More visibility may help to shatter stereotypes and give positive models for women interested in the maritime sector. IMO and WISTA have been involved in efforts to promote women's visibility and recognition in maritime professions (International Maritime Organization, 2026).

At the end of the day, gender equality entails not only the implementation of one-off actions but also systemic changes. The increase in female representation within the industry is crucial, but there also needs to be consideration of how different structures, practices, and cultural presumptions affect recruitment, retention, promotions, leadership, and working conditions. As pointed out by Kitada (2026), leadership development and promotion equity are critical for retaining competent women.

Aspirations for Future Women Seafarers

Greater exposure to successful women seafarers will give rise to a sense of confidence and aspiration in younger women to join a maritime career. It becomes significant because a greater number of women seeing their role models being successful in maritime careers will help them identify these occupations as feasible and within reach.

Literature underscores the significance of education, technical training, self-confidence, mentoring, and exposure to maritime occupations in the formative years. ITF Seafarers (2026) highlights the lack of awareness regarding maritime careers amongst women as a constraint to entering this field, while OSM Thome (2023) stresses education, scholarships, and recruitment as possible strategies.

The empowerment of future female seafarers thus involves individual and institutional efforts. Training and education can enhance technical skills, whereas mentorship and role models can boost self-confidence and career aspirations. The strategic focus of IMO on training, visibility, and recognition is yet another example of how pathways need to be made for women to join and succeed in the industry (Kitada, 2026).

Synthesis

The literature indicates that women in seafaring have encountered various interrelated obstacles that hinder their integration into the maritime industry. In particular, the fact that women have very little information about career opportunities in this industry can be considered a major problem in this context. In addition, the idea that seafaring has remained an exclusively male sphere of employment is a significant obstacle that keeps women away from pursuing their careers in the maritime industry. Furthermore, the lack of female role models for women interested in this career makes seafaring even less attractive for future female professionals.

In addition to the difficulties encountered during recruitment, once women are employed in the maritime field, they face several organizational and cultural barriers that may influence their performance and experience at work. The culture of male-dominated workplaces, lack of proper equipment on board ships, and related problems, along with fears about discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, and sexual violence, constitute further barriers on the road to career satisfaction and success. Nevertheless, scientific evidence demonstrates that women, having overcome all barriers, are highly resilient, adaptable, and competent professionals who make significant contributions to maritime shipping. It follows that it is crucial to enhance women's representation in

this sphere, raise awareness among the public, improve organizational systems, and ensure workplace safety. Such efforts will not only advance gender equality but also address the shortage of skilled maritime professionals.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This undertaking employed a qualitative research design, as it focused on the lived experiences of women seafarers. Jain (2023) explains that qualitative research design is a methodological approach that examines the meanings people or groups give to their experiences to investigate and comprehend complex phenomena. It is frequently used in disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and the social sciences (Bhandari, 2025) to highlight the complexity and diversity of human experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and actions (Carson, 2025) that are not fully reflected in statistical analysis alone.

The research aimed to gain insight into the lived experiences and careers of Filipino female seafarers by investigating their motivation, gender issues, adaptation, professional development, and coping mechanisms; thus, narrative inquiry as the qualitative research method was employed. Narrative inquiry was applicable as it enables participants' experiences, in this case, the women seafarers, to be analyzed as meaningful discourses set against the backdrop of their personal and professional settings. It is a qualitative research method that seeks to comprehend how people find meaning in their life experiences through the art of storytelling. This method highlights the significance of personal narratives, which can be expressed in different formats like letters, diaries, and interviews (Gilstein, 2023). It can uncover distinct viewpoints and provide a more profound comprehension of a circumstance, thus frequently amplifying the voices of marginalized groups whose insights are seldom considered (Deakin University, 2024).

Participants of the Study

For this qualitative research study, the respondents involved in the research study were ten (10) Filipino female seafarers who were chosen through a purposive sampling method, considering their direct and related experience in the maritime industry. The use of purposive sampling is justified by the fact that qualitative research seeks rich participants who have specific qualities and knowledge related to the subject under investigation. According to Ahmad and Wilkins (2025), purposive sampling is one of the most common qualitative sampling methods where participant selection is specifically made in relation to the objectives and needs of the study.

Participants in this research project were consciously selected based on set criteria. Participants needed to meet the following requirements for inclusion: (1) be Filipino nationals and identify themselves as women; (2) have been employed aboard commercial cargo ships, commercial passenger ships, tankers, fishing vessels, or offshore rigs as licensed officers, ratings, or cadettes; (3) have completed at least one voyage contract with a minimum of six (6) months at sea; (4) be 21 years of age or older; (5) agree to give their personal experiences as women seafarers, such as their problems, coping strategies, and the reality of their careers; (6) be able to speak in English and/or Filipino; and (7) give their informed consent.

The participants were 10 women who had worked in various capacities in the maritime industry. These women had 2 to 7 years of sea service, allowing the study to capture insights from those exposed to the profession for varying lengths of time. Among the participants were those who worked as deck and engine personnel, both officers and ratings, which gave the researchers insightful information on how these women performed their professional duties and how they coped in the maritime industry.

Recruitment of participants was done by purposively identifying possible candidates with the help of those people who had knowledge about women seafarers and could fulfill the requirements of the study. The identified participants were then contacted, and they were made aware of the objectives of the study and their rights as participants of the research. Only those participants who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and provided informed consent participated in the study. Participants provided information either through personal interviews or open-ended responses through a semi-structured interview guide.

The final number of participants was dependent on the quality and adequacy of the information gathered regarding the research questions. Data collection continued until additional interviews did not yield any new themes or information about the phenomenon in question. In this case, data saturation was achieved when ten participants were interviewed, as the narratives were sufficient to answer the research questions. By using purposive sampling along with the saturation criterion, the researchers were able to concentrate on those people who had rich firsthand experience of being a woman seafarer instead of numerical representation.

Data Gathering Instrument

To gather the data needed in the study, one-on-one interviews and open-ended surveys were conducted utilizing a semi-structured interview guide. One-on-one interviews are a qualitative research technique in which an interviewer speaks with a single participant, or interviewee, in person. This style enables the interviewer and interviewee to have a targeted, customized conversation (QuestionPro, 2024). On the other hand, Barnard (2025) explains that open-ended surveys allow respondents to respond in their own words, in free-form. Participants in open-ended ones are free to communicate their ideas, emotions, and opinions however they see fit. Frequently, responses resemble conversations, yet because they are in the form of a survey, they remain easy to understand and evaluate.

Data Gathering Procedure

Ethical considerations were of utmost priority when gathering the data needed for the study.

First, the researchers sought help from colleagues knowledgeable about potential participants in the study.

Second, after identifying potential participants, the researchers communicated with them via a social media message informing them that they were considered participants in the study. The communication also included the researchers seeking the prospective participants' approval to participate in the study and information about their rights as participants once they agreed.

Third, the researcher scheduled the interview. In scheduling the interview, the researchers gave the participant the option to choose from the following: a one-on-one interview, an online interview, or a written open-ended survey.

Fourth, before the commencement of the interview, the researchers sought the participant's consent to record the conversation (video or voice only); otherwise, the researchers would take notes manually, then orient them to the confidentiality of their answers and the anonymity of their identity.

Fifth, during the interview, the participant was given free time to express their opinions on the topics covered. The researchers conducted individual interviews with the participants, with an average of 1.5 hours per participant. Repeat interviews were not conducted due to time constraints and the limited availability of the interviewees, many of whom were actively engaged in their professional duties and had varying schedules onboard. Nevertheless, the researchers continued the interview process until data saturation was achieved, at which point no substantially new themes, insights, or information emerged from subsequent interviews. Thus, although member checking through repeated interviews was not conducted, the attainment of data saturation, together with peer debriefing and the systematic review of the collected data, helped strengthen the confirmability and credibility of the study's findings.

Lastly, at the end of the interview, the participant was reassured of the confidentiality of their answers and the anonymity of their identity.

The collected qualitative data were transcribed, organized, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Common themes were identified and categorized to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of women seafarers. All data were systematically processed in MS Excel to ensure accurate identification of patterns and themes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the strongest determinant of trust and plays a crucial role in shaping the extent to which people trust others (Zhang et al., 2024). It describes the level of assurance researchers have regarding the veracity and correctness of their results (McLeod, 2024).

To maintain the study's trustworthiness or rigor, the study adhered to the criteria set by Lincoln and Guba (1985), as presented in DeMarco (2025), including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to deliver reliable and meaningful research findings. These principles ensured that the study's results accurately reflect participants' experiences and are valuable for future research.

Credibility. Abbas (2023) defines credibility as the extent to which a study is considered accurate and accountable. It protects against subjective viewpoints, feelings, and experiences that could otherwise mask the actual nature of the research topic. In this study, the researchers employed member checking to ensure the credibility of the results. In this technique, participants were given access to the data, interpretations, and conclusions. It enables participants to make corrections, make clarifications, and add more information as needed (McLeod, 2024).

Transferability. Transferability refers to the process of abstracting insights from individuals, settings, and time periods so they can be meaningfully applied to other people, contexts, or situations that were not directly examined in the study (Drisko, 2024). In this study, the researchers employed purposive sampling to ensure the study's transferability. In this strategy, participants are selected based on how well they meet the study's inclusion criteria and are relevant to the research questions and research strategy, enabling the researchers to gain deep insights into complex phenomena (Tajik et al., 2024).

Dependability. Dependability pertains to the consistency and stability of research methodology (Jansen, 2025). It guarantees that qualitative results are steady, regular, and not arbitrary (Lal, 2025). Thus, the study's results can be replicated in a comparable demographic, circumstance, or setting (Koch, 2006, as cited in Kakar et al., 2023). In this study, audit trails were maintained to ensure dependability. In qualitative research, an audit trail is a systematic, thorough documentation of the research process that enables an external reviewer to trace the study's trajectory and evaluate the reliability and validity of the results (McLeod, 2024). In this technique, the researchers used a journal to record notes on data-collection experiences, document design changes, reflect on the researchers' experience conducting the study, and record memos generated during data analysis.

Confirmability. Confirmability is the degree to which respondents, rather than research bias, motivation, or interest, influence a study's conclusions (Connelly, 2016, as cited in Ayton, 2023; Indhuja, 2025). Further, it is established by consistently reviewing and verifying data during both collection and analysis, ensuring that the findings are grounded in the evidence and could be replicated or affirmed by other researchers (Spranger, 2025). In this study, the researchers employed peer debriefing. Peer debriefing refers to engaging one or more impartial colleagues with no personal stake in the study to strengthen research validity by critically reviewing the researchers' transcripts, methodology, and findings (Delve & Limpaecher, 2021). In this technique, the researcher allowed colleagues or other qualitative researchers to review interpretations and findings.

Data Analyses

To analyze the data needed to address the study's objectives, thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis approach commonly used with textual data such as interview recordings or transcripts. In this method, the researchers carefully reviewed the data to uncover recurring themes, including shared topics, ideas, and meaningful patterns that consistently emerge across the dataset (Caulfield, 2026; Perenara-Wilkinson, 2025).

Thematic analysis consists of six distinct phases, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which the researchers systematically undertook in this study.

1. Familiarization with the data. In this study, the researchers immersed themselves in the narratives of women seafarers by repeatedly reading interview transcripts and field notes. Initial observations, reflections, and significant statements related to their lived experiences at sea—such as work conditions, gender-related challenges, coping mechanisms, and professional growth—were noted to develop a holistic understanding of the data before formal coding began.
2. Generating initial codes. After becoming thoroughly familiar with the data, the researchers systematically coded meaningful segments of participants' accounts that relate to the research questions. These initial codes captured important ideas, experiences, and perceptions of women seafarers, allowing rich and extensive narratives to be organized into smaller, meaningful units. The steps included analysis of transcripts and field notes to extract relevant segments, generation of code clusters, examination of proposed themes for consistency and differentiation, defining themes, and excerpting. The data were analyzed using MS Excel.
3. Searching for themes. The researchers then examined the initial codes and cluster-related codes together to form potential themes. This phase focused on identifying broader patterns in the lived experiences of women seafarers, including workplace dynamics, gender discrimination, resilience, support systems, and career aspirations.
4. Reviewing themes. Preliminary themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they were coherent, distinct, and well supported by the data. The researchers verified whether each theme accurately represents the coded extracts and meaningfully reflects the participants' overall experiences. Weak or overlapping themes were revised, merged, or removed.
5. Defining and naming themes. In this phase, the researchers clearly defined the essence and boundaries of each theme. Each theme was carefully articulated to explain how it captures a significant aspect of women seafarers' lived experiences and how it relates to the research questions. Clear and descriptive names were assigned to reflect the core meaning of each theme.
6. Producing the report. Finally, the researchers presented the findings in a coherent and analytical narrative. This step involved selecting rich and compelling excerpts from participants' accounts to illustrate each theme, integrating these with interpretive analysis, and relating the findings to existing literature and the overall objectives of the study on the lived experiences of women seafarers.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly upheld throughout the study.

The researchers secured an ethics certificate from the Ethics Review Board on March 30, 2026, showing the researchers' compliance with the ethical standards of the institution.

Before data collection commenced, informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were clearly briefed on the study's purpose, the scope of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Participants were given sufficient time to raise questions and make an informed, voluntary decision to participate. Written consents were obtained to confirm that participation was based on full understanding and personal choice.

To reduce the risk of harm, the researchers approached the interviews with sensitivity, recognizing the personal and work-related nature of the experiences shared by women seafarers, including discrimination, harassment, and emotional challenges. Participants were free to decline to answer any question they found uncomfortable, and all interviews were conducted in a respectful and empathetic manner. Participants' confidentiality was safeguarded using pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details from transcripts and reports, ensuring that individual identities remain protected.

Transparency and integrity guided the entire research process. The study involved no deception, as participants were fully informed about the research objectives, procedures, and how the data would be used. The data gathered were intended solely for scholarly purposes and were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access.

By adhering to these ethical practices, the study sought to uphold the rights, dignity, and well-being of women seafarers while maintaining the trustworthiness and credibility of the research outcomes.

Presentation, Analysis, And Interpretation Of Data

Thematic analysis of the participants' narratives generated four higher-order themes that describe the experiences of women seafarers as they enter, establish themselves, adapt to, and contribute to a traditionally male-dominated maritime profession. The themes are: (1) Entering and Navigating a Male-Dominated Profession; (2) Establishing Professional Legitimacy Through Competence; (3) Resilience, Coping, and Support at Sea; and (4) From Individual Achievement to Institutional Inclusion. These themes represent a progression from the motivations that brought women into seafaring, through the challenges and professional processes they encountered onboard, toward personal resilience, workplace contribution, and calls for institutional change.

Entering and Navigating a Male-Dominated Profession

Motivations for Entering Seafaring

The participants' choice to embrace seafaring has been driven by a blend of factors, including economic, family, professional, and personal ones. Economic stability, career development, international experience, and the willingness to offer a better future for their families were some of the key factors motivating them to choose a career in the maritime industry. For some of them, seafaring is not only about work but also about social mobility and self-reliance.

It can also be gathered from the stories of the participants that their choice to pursue the maritime profession was made independently. Some chose the profession because of its technological nature, while some considered it an avenue for world exploration and developing independence in their careers. One of the participants, Anna, shared that she had an interest in navigation and the operations of ships, although her family did not have any seafarers. This story proves that women join the maritime profession out of individual desires instead of being influenced by tradition.

These results corroborate those obtained by Baldonado and Espiritu (2024), who found that women in the Philippines join the maritime industry due to financial independence, professional satisfaction, and the opportunity for upward social mobility despite the gender-based constraints. In a similar vein, according to Tang (2023), there are many job openings, attractive pay rates, and inclusivity programs that may serve as motivating factors in encouraging women to join maritime careers. In this connection, the current results indicate that women choose a seafaring career based on both instrumental and intrinsic motivators.

The choice to pursue a career in a field that has been traditionally dominated by males is especially important since women still make up a tiny percentage of the world's seafaring labor force. Hence, the reasons for participation should be analyzed considering the general tendency whereby women consciously choose to pursue careers that were traditionally seen as male domains.

Gender-Based Barriers and Challenges

Though the participants joined seafaring with high hopes, their stories were equally revealing about gender-related problems, such as discrimination, gender stereotyping, lack of equal opportunity, organizational problems, and the requirement of proving themselves more than men. This is because the participants felt that their strength, skills, and suitability for the profession were being questioned. After all, they were women.

The results show that there were gender-related barriers that occurred both before and during employment. Barriers at the structural level include problems in recruiting and deployment of women, while workplace

barriers include the stereotypical views about women being able to do jobs that require physical strength or technical knowledge. The conclusion of the study also provides examples of practical barriers such as ill-fitting personal protective equipment and delayed deployment of female cadets.

The participants faced emotional and personal problems related to life on the ship. Long absence from home, homesickness, loneliness, tiredness, stress, and lack of communication were some of the aspects of the emotional problems of being at sea. This shows that the problems women face at sea are not only gender-specific but also those arising due to the social and psychological nature of their job.

The results are in line with the IMO-WISTA Women in Maritime Survey 2024, which highlights ongoing difficulties for women in terms of recruitment, career progress, and support at work. The results are also in line with the general body of research on seafaring regarding seafarers' loneliness, job stress, and psychological well-being (Brooks & Greenberg, 2022). In summary, the results suggest that women's involvement in seafaring is dependent not only on their personal qualifications but also on the organizational context at the workplace.

Most importantly, the fact is that the problems associated with gender did not hinder them from building their careers. Instead, these problems were incorporated into the strategy that they developed for negotiating with the male-dominated workplace. In other words, the stories reveal how women are not only subjected to workplace obstacles, but how they actively negotiate their way into their profession.

Establishing Professional Legitimacy Through Competence

Professional Responsibilities and Shipboard Life

Participants showed that women undertake quite significant technical, operational, administrative, and safety tasks during work on board. These tasks included navigation, watchkeeping, cargo handling, compliance with safety regulations, readiness for emergencies, documentation, maintenance, and following the rules and regulations of maritime activities. Moreover, their work demanded discipline, flexibility, teamwork, communication skills, and the ability to work in hierarchies and multicultural contexts.

Results show that professional activity at sea is based on professionalism and accountability of seafarers irrespective of gender. Female seafarers need to possess the same level of proficiency and competences as any other maritime professional. The growing technological aspect of shipping makes technical skills and abilities very important.

It can be said that what the participants have experienced proves the fallacy that women are not well-suited for operational and technical jobs within the industry. The participants' experience shows that competence comes from education, training, experience, and constant involvement in shipboard activities. It is important to mention that such an aspect is especially significant when the industry undergoes a technological revolution.

Recognition Through Competence and Performance

Professional recognition was seen as something which had to be earned by displaying competence as opposed to being given for free. Some of the criteria which were necessary in building credibility and earning respect included reliability, technical expertise, professionalism, leadership and competence under pressure.

One of the common themes found in these narratives was the idea that women were often perceived as having a "burden of proof" due to gendered assumptions about what women could do. Professional performance was thus seen to challenge gendered perceptions about women's technical and leadership skills. Competence was thus not only a professional criterion but was also a process through which legitimacy was achieved.

This finding therefore confirms the claim made by Tseng and Pilcher (2024) that recruitment, promotion, and professional recognition should be merit-based, not gender-based. It further reinforces the findings of Baldonado and Espiritu (2024) about the capability of Filipino women seafarers to make a meaningful contribution to the maritime industry despite their gender-based limitations.

Nevertheless, the necessity of proving the capability of women on a regular basis is indicative of a critical structural problem. It is unacceptable that equality requires women to outdo themselves just to get equal professional recognition as men. Hence, based on the experiences of the participants, there is a clear necessity for organizational culture to be changed from one where women have to prove themselves all the time to another one where the professional competence of individuals is judged fairly.

Redefining Gender Roles

Another factor that influenced the redefinition of gender roles at sea was the experience of the participants in their professional field. Rather than viewing navigation, technical work, physical work, and leadership as traditionally masculine attributes, the participants believed that these should be based on the principles of competence, commitment, professionalism, and performance.

Women's presence in the field of seafaring not only brings about change at the individual level but may bring about cultural change as well. By fulfilling the tasks of a leader and a navigator, a woman undermines the traditional correlation between masculinity and maritime skills.

The issue of gender mainstreaming and structural interventions is important for women's involvement in the maritime industry according to Kitada (2026). The current findings prove the point in the sense that gender equality cannot be achieved through women adjusting to the pre-existing gender structures. In other words, the maritime industry needs to develop competence-based cultures that will accept and evaluate people based on competence rather than gender.

Consequently, the experiences of the participants illustrate the process of moving from gender-based occupational identities to competence-based professional identities. The move is key for equality since it focuses on more than just the number of women involved in the industry.

Resilience, Coping, and Support at Sea

Personal Growth and Empowerment

From the experiences of the participants, the difficulties faced with seafaring resulted in the personal and professional development of the participants. The difficulties of isolation, tough work environment, ambiguity regarding gender issues, and professional pressures helped in improving self-confidence, independence, adaptability, decision-making ability, and resilience of the participants.

It appears from the stories that resilience was achieved through experience and not as an innate personal trait. The participants did not start resilient; rather, resilience was developed by learning to deal with tough situations, handling more responsibility, interacting with people from different cultures, and dealing with uncertainties.

This result is supported by various studies stressing that resilience is a key element of coping with the job demands and difficult work environment. Resilience is especially important for women seafarers who find themselves in male-dominated environments and separated from their support systems for long periods of time (Janssen et al., 2024; Sangalang & Sebastian, 2025).

Notably, the results offer a more nuanced understanding of resilience, which is not merely about "being strong." As one of the participants explained, resilience can be about becoming aware of personal limits, taking time off, staying in touch with one's family, accepting help from other crew members, and recovering physically and psychologically. This perspective on resilience corresponds to the modern understanding of resilience as adaptation through using all available resources.

This shows that seafaring is a task that may be challenging but empowering at the same time. Despite the fact that seafaring offers both occupational and emotional challenges for women, overcoming these challenges will boost their self-efficacy and identity.

Coping Mechanisms

Participants used a variety of individual coping mechanisms to deal with the stresses and difficulties of living on board ships. This includes staying in contact with their families, praying, exercise, routines, optimism, getting enough sleep, recreational activities, and working productively.

Staying in contact with their families was especially vital for participants in this study. The nature of the seafarer's work involves spending a considerable amount of time away from their families and friends. Therefore, electronic communications help them stay connected with their families.

The results from the study corroborate those of Brooks and Greenberg (2022), where isolation, occupational stress, and psychological well-being were identified as critical issues facing maritime workers. Likewise, Szafran-Dobrowolska et al. (2023) and Weerakoon Karunatileke et al. (2024) underscore the importance of coping and social support in sustaining the psychological well-being of seafarers. Therefore, the current results help to reiterate the importance of integrating mental and emotional well-being in the concept of occupational safety in the maritime industry, rather than as individual issues.

The ways through which the participants coped with challenges at work can be seen as individual and social. Personal discipline, positive thinking, exercise, and spirituality were some of the ways through which the participants managed their own well-being, while relationships with family and colleagues at work were some of the ways in which they managed stress socially.

Family, Peer, Spiritual, and Organizational Support

It is clear that social support was a key factor helping participants to maintain their careers. In particular, family communication helped participants feel emotionally stable, while supportive relations with crewmates were helpful to overcome feelings of isolation. Participants also used spirituality and prayer as sources of emotional support. Mentors and colleagues were also important for participants.

Social support is especially relevant to the stories of difficulties faced by participants onboard. Instead of solving all difficulties alone, participants had to ask for help and communicate with family members and other crewmates. Thus, it becomes obvious that resilience should not be interpreted as an individual concept, but rather as one depending on supportive social relations.

The results align with the observation by Senbursa and Dunder (2024) about the impact of supportive workplace culture and social ties on seafarer wellbeing and retention. The results are in line with the systematic review by Brooks & Greenberg (2022) that focuses on the psychological implications of isolation and the need to improve support for mariners.

In the case of women seafarers, having supportive organizational contexts becomes more significant since gender-specific stress adds to the regular psychological challenges associated with work at sea. Thus, organizations should treat communication, mental well-being, mentoring, and a psychologically safe workplace as a retention tool.

From Individual Achievement to Institutional Inclusion

Women's Contributions to the Maritime Workplace

The respondents saw women as playing valuable roles in the processes that go on in ships. The roles played by women included being technically proficient, professional, detail-oriented, adhering to safety measures, communicating effectively, working in teams, showing empathy, demonstrating good leadership skills, and building positive relationships with other people.

Another finding was that women play a role in creating diversity in decision-making and interaction processes at the workplace. The narratives presented by the respondents challenge the notion that women's contribution to maritime work is restricted to certain tasks only.

The results are in line with the wider body of knowledge discussed in the manuscript. According to Justesen (2024), changes in the roles of women in maritime employment are emphasized, and Wu et al. (2025), greater recruitment, retention, mentoring, and leadership development efforts are necessary. As well, the inclusion of women in the maritime workforce is considered vital by Narayanan et al. (2023) for its sustainability.

The stories of the participants show that the participation of women should not be argued only through the lens of gender diversity, but that women should rather be regarded as maritime professionals whose technical and professional skills add value to the safe, efficient, collaborative, and sustainable operation of ships.

Recommendations for Industry Improvement

As a result of their experience, the participants identified various needs of institutions that require change and improvement. Such issues include anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, effective reporting, fair promotion procedures, mentoring programs, leadership training, gender sensitivity programs, proper facilities and equipment, and availability of counseling.

A particularly important aspect related to this topic is associated with the work environment and equipment. In the context of the participants' experience, the identification of the ill-fitting protective clothing reveals how the occupational system that seems to be quite normal may be designed specifically for men and therefore be disadvantageous to women.

In addition, the participants stressed the importance of shifting from theoretical diversity policies to practical steps taken by the organization. Such actions include mechanisms for reporting sexual harassment and abuse, fair access to training and promotions, mentoring programs, psychosocial support, and others. These suggestions are consistent with Kitada (2026), which mention recruiting, retaining, mentoring, developing leadership skills, enforcing policies, and creating a supportive work environment as crucial factors in supporting women's career in shipping.

Accordingly, the results show that gender equality is not an individual matter but is related to the system of the workplace. Women may become resilient, competent, and cope with stress. However, for sustainable integration, a systemic change is needed. The shipping companies, maritime training organizations, recruitment companies, regulators, and other players should play their part in creating an equal professional environment.

Aspirations for Future Women Seafarers

Eventually, the experience of the participants transcended their individual careers. As a result of dealing with gender stereotypes, professional barriers, isolation, and challenges of living and working on a ship, they saw themselves as future role models for young women planning to embark on a career in the maritime field. The messages focused on education, professional and technological development, self-confidence, perseverance, determination, and preparation for life at sea.

The participants advised aspiring women seafarers to prepare themselves technically but also mentally and emotionally to deal with the reality of maritime jobs. For instance, Janet stressed the significance of building up one's resilience, having faith in one's abilities, keeping on learning, and staying true to oneself without having to change for the industry. Similarly, Kate stressed the significance of being mentally, emotionally, and physically prepared for the conditions of isolation, stress, hard work, and adaptation to a new environment.

These stories show how significant it is to be represented. When women see other women succeed in their roles as officers, as technical staff, and as leaders on board the ship, it makes them think differently about the limits of maritime careers. Thus, the participants are not only working people but also symbols and role models for future generations.

Similarly, Kitada (2026) stresses the significance of visibility, leadership skills, participation, and opportunities for the promotion of women's maritime careers. In the current research, this idea is supplemented with another thought. It concerns the social effects that each person's career can have. Women who manage to join the maritime career and stay in it can serve as role models for other women.

Simulacrum

Four higher-order themes occurred in this study, including (1) Entering and Navigating a Male-Dominated Profession; (2) Establishing Professional Legitimacy Through Competence; (3) Resilience, Coping, and Support at Sea; and (4) From Individual Achievement to Institutional Inclusion.



M/V CAPT. JOHN B. LACSON

Entering and Navigating a Male-Dominated Profession

This theme illustrates the initial involvement of women in maritime careers and their ongoing navigation of a field traditionally viewed as dominated by men. The accounts of the participants reveal that women pursue seafaring for a variety of reasons. Their motivations encompass financial stability, career advancement, global exposure, family goals, personal autonomy, fascination with technology, and the aspiration for professional development. Therefore, engaging in seafaring can be perceived as both a practical decision—aiming for employment, income, and social advancement—and a personal choice, embodying individual ambition and interest in maritime occupations.

Despite gaining access, gender-related obstacles still persist. Participants reported encountering discrimination, stereotypes related to gender, unequal opportunities, skepticism regarding women's physical and technical skills, challenges with recruitment and deployment, and practical issues such as ill-fitting personal protective gear. These accounts suggest that women face the dual challenge of meeting the technical requirements of seafaring while also navigating organizational cultures and expectations influenced by masculine norms.

Recent findings reinforce that this continues to be a major concern. The 2024 IMO-WISTA Women in Maritime Survey, released in 2025, revealed that women comprised merely 1% of the seafarers employed by the organizations included in the survey, highlighting the ongoing gender disparity in maritime professions. The survey further pinpointed barriers to recruitment, stereotypes, challenges in career advancement, and a lack of adequate support in the workplace.

Similarly, Baldonado and Espiritu (2024) found that women experienced resistance to sea-based employment because seafaring continues to be perceived by some as a profession for men.

Establishing Professional Legitimacy Through Competence

Within the second theme, female mariners build professional credibility and standing through expertise, technical proficiency, reliability, discipline, and accountability. Participants explained that they handle critical shipboard duties such as navigation, cargo operations, watchkeeping, safety compliance, emergency management, documentation, and maintenance. Their collective experiences emphasize that thriving in a maritime career is fundamentally driven by individual competence rather than gender.

A key dimension of this theme centers on the "burden of proof" reported by female mariners. Participants noted feeling compelled to continually prove their skills to earn the level of professional respect routinely granted to their male counterparts. Consequently, technical competence serves a dual role: it acts not only as a job requirement, but as the essential tool through which women build authority, gain respect, and secure professional credibility at sea.

This result aligns with Tseng and Pilcher (2025), which highlighted the significant contributions women bring to shipboard work while pointing out structural hurdles linked to corporate policies and male-centric workplaces. Furthermore, global data demonstrates that gender stereotypes persist in hindering women's career growth, underscoring the necessity for merit-centered hiring, advancement, skill development, and professional acknowledgement.

This theme additionally reflects a shift away from traditional maritime gender expectations. As women effectively execute technical tasks, vessel navigation, physical duties, and leadership roles, these functions are no longer viewed as strictly male domains. Accordingly, the mariners' lived experiences point to a transition from gender-defined job roles to an overarching professional identity grounded in capability and merit.

Resilience, Coping, and Support at Sea

The third theme illustrates how female mariners adapt to the physical, emotional, mental, and interpersonal challenges of ocean-going life. Participants noted coping with isolation, longing for home, loneliness, physical exhaustion, occupational stress, extended time away from loved ones, communication barriers, and the demands of a high-pressure setting. Nevertheless, enduring these obstacles fostered heightened self-assurance, flexibility, self-reliance, decision-making capability, and personal resilience.

Crucially, the findings avoid framing resilience as merely a personal capacity to endure hardship. Instead, resilience emerges dynamically over time through lived experience, practical adaptation, supportive relationships, and resource availability. To manage stress, participants relied on strategies such as staying connected with family, exercising, establishing structured daily routines, prioritizing sufficient rest, engaging in leisure activities, maintaining optimism, practicing spirituality, staying productively engaged in work, and building camaraderie with shipmates.

This view aligns with the systematic review by Janssen et al. (2024), which highlighted seafaring as a high-demand occupation where resilience plays a critical role in managing workplace stressors and preserving psychological health. Their review underscored that mariner resilience is multifaceted, requiring further study alongside structured institutional support systems. Contemporary research similarly highlights isolation, heavy workloads, and inadequate support mechanisms as ongoing threats to seafarer well-being.

The mariners' testimonies strongly highlight that social connections form an integral component of individual resilience. Ongoing family communication offers emotional grounding, whereas encouraging shipmates, mentors, professional peers, and supportive organizational frameworks mitigate feelings of isolation and foster career longevity for women. Correspondingly, modern IMO guidelines advocate for safe, inclusive, and encouraging work environments, alongside structured mentorship and leadership pathways, as essential strategies for attracting and retaining female talent in the maritime sector.

From Individual Achievement to Institutional Inclusion

The fourth theme illustrates the shift from personal accomplishment toward comprehensive organizational and structural change. Female mariners showed that women add substantial value to vessel operations through technical expertise, high professional standards, safety focus, collaborative teamwork, clear communication, empathy, leadership, and positive workplace dynamics. Consequently, their inclusion reaches beyond mere numerical diversity, introducing key operational strengths and varied viewpoints to the maritime sector.

Nevertheless, the study underscores that personal success by itself is insufficient to achieve true gender equity. Participants highlighted essential institutional measures, including zero-tolerance policies against harassment and bias, transparent reporting channels, equitable career advancement and training, structured mentoring, leadership initiatives, gender sensitivity training, suitable onboard amenities and gear, and available psychological support. The issue of ill-fitting safety gear serves as a clear example of how standard workplace systems were historically tailored primarily for male workers.

Recent global initiatives strongly reinforce this theme. The 2026 IMO International Day for Women in Maritime highlights the transition from conceptual policy to practical implementation, striving to embed gender equality across all maritime institutions on shore and at sea. Additionally, the IMO, alongside the World Maritime University, introduced the 2026 Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming in the Maritime Sector to assist maritime agencies, corporate entities, port authorities, and maritime academies in weaving gender-inclusive practices into their operational frameworks.

These findings hold particular significance within the Philippines. In 2026, MARINA renewed its pledge toward gender inclusivity and female empowerment, while Phase II of the Philippine National Maritime research study highlighted ongoing systemic barriers, stressing the urgency of programs aimed at boosting female recruitment and promotion into senior leadership roles.

Ultimately, the mariners' desire to serve as role models highlights how one person's accomplishments can catalyze broader societal progress. As women successfully step into roles as officers, technical specialists, and leaders, their visibility redefines the possibilities for future generations of aspiring female seafarers.

CONCLUSIONS

The following are the conclusions of the study:

The study highlights how female mariners undergo an ongoing journey of entering, adjusting to, and navigating a historically male-dominated industry. Participants were driven by financial security, career growth, global opportunities, family well-being, personal autonomy, and a strong interest in shipboard careers. Nonetheless, their accounts exposed persistent gender stereotypes, bias, limited opportunities, deployment hurdles, and practical workplace obstacles. Despite these hurdles, the mariners proactively negotiated their roles and remained committed to their maritime careers.

Additionally, the results indicate that women build professional credibility through demonstrated skill and operational performance. Participants showcased their qualifications across navigation, watchkeeping, cargo operations, safety compliance, emergency preparedness, collaboration, communication, and leadership. These lived experiences dismantle the assumption that technical and command duties aboard ships belong exclusively

to men. However, the ongoing pressure women face to prove their worth reveals that professional recognition remains unequal, reinforcing the need for merit-based and gender-inclusive shipboard environments.

The research further demonstrates that resilience, effective coping strategies, and strong support networks are vital for sustaining women's long-term careers at sea. Although participants encountered isolation, homesickness, exhaustion, occupational stress, and long periods away from home, they managed these demands through family communication, physical exercise, spiritual practices, positive mindsets, structured routines, and sufficient sleep. Crucially, resilience was understood not as a solitary trait, but as a collective process reinforced by family, crew members, mentors, peers, and supportive organizational structures.

In conclusion, the four themes highlight a progression from individual success toward systemic organizational inclusion. Women enrich shipboard operations through technical expertise, high professional standards, safety focus, teamwork, effective communication, strong leadership, and diverse viewpoints; however, their lasting inclusion hinges on structural reforms in hiring, promotion, mentorship, corporate policies, equipment, and mental health support. Ultimately, the mariners' journeys prove that gender equality in maritime cannot rely solely on women's endurance or their constant effort to prove their worth; it demands that maritime institutions establish truly equitable and inclusive settings where women can thrive, remain, and inspire future generations.

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