

## **Female Students' Perception on Gender in Maritime Institute in Jakarta**

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**Abstract:** Recently, the number of female students in STIP has been rising – especially in Nautical Department, since the chance is zero in the other department; Marine Engineering. The interest in taking part in maritime industry, which long has been known as the world of men, has also caught women's attention. Before becoming students, they have to pass a series of tests, regardless of their gender. However, at the work field, there are still some challenges for them due to the fact of being women. This study is intended to look into students' attitudes and awareness on gender issues in maritime industry, where their future lies, as well as to raise awareness on the issues. Conducted in STIP, this study involves all the female students of Nautical Department, ranging from the first-year students to the last-year students. Thus, the participants are divided into two categories: those who have been on voyage and those who have not. The data are taken through structured interviews with both close-ended and open-ended questions and analyzed by using qualitative method. This study shows that most of the students who have not been on voyage are not aware of the plausible gender issues occur while posted on board ship. On the contrary those who have been on board, realize the issues and have actually started to be aware since they got assigned on a ship.

**Key words:** seafarers, gender, awareness, maritime, students

**INTRODUCTION**

The reality of a global gender imbalance in the workforce is undeniable. Although women comprise almost half of the nation's population, their participation in the workforce is unequal with men. Globally, the male employment ratio stands at 65 to 70 percent of the population, while the same figure is 40 to 45% for women. This is due to many factors such as the many assumptions that the ability of men is better than woman, especially physical and emotionally abilities.

Shipping is generally male dominated industry and it runs very long and deep. Hard physical activity needed on board is one of a big reason for this tradition. The lack of support of being woman's seafarer usually comes from the family and society. It is considered safe for woman choose main stream careers such as computer science, secretary, IT or medicine. This is because they have little knowledge of the prosperous and challenging career that they can make in the maritime field. Moreover, schools less facilitate the students for discussion about various maritime career options available for female. There is also few source of information about this career in the media related magazine or newspaper. From this case, the rate of woman in maritime industry is very low. However, through its global program IMO is making a concerted effort to help the industry move on from that tradition.

Based on IMO's programmed on the Integration of Women in the Maritime Sector (IWMS) that has a primary objective to encourage IMO Member States to open the doors of their maritime institutes to enable women to train alongside men and so acquire the high-level of competence that the maritime industry demands, it encourages more women to engage in a career at sea. A number of campaigns also launched by a various stakeholders and the awareness of being seafarer are no longer lifetime employment but rather a stepping stone for a future career ashore. This clearly influences the high interest of female students to start their career in seafaring industry by joining maritime institutes, especially in Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Pelayaran (STIP) Jakarta. The female students view that it's easier to improve their economic and entrepreneurship side. More girls register and join the students' enrollment selection every year.

Hence, this research is intended to find out how these female students see the seafaring industry from their gender point of view, if there is any, as well as to identify their perception on being women seafarer at sea. A woman entering a male-dominated area often has to accept a totally new life entailing new knowledge and information, as well as a new culture, new jokes, pastimes, and values. Generally there is an overwhelming risk for the woman to feel out of place, inadequate, superfluous or like a mascot, which may make them lose the interest in the program. It is important that women in male-dominated programs develop useful coping strategies for these conditions, without losing their own identities (Cars & Osterman, 2015).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the raise in awareness of being women at sea in Indonesia since the declaration of Indonesian Female Mariners (IFMA) (Pelaut Indonesia, 2016), researches on gender issues in higher education in general is getting more attention than in specifically maritime education. This research itself is the first gender-related research held in Indonesian maritime education.

### A. Gender Awareness

Awareness is knowledge that something exists, or understanding of a situation or subject at the present time based on information or experience (Cambridge Dictionary, 2009). Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women created in the families, societies, and cultures; including expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, and likely behaviors of men and women. This concept is vital as it reveals how women's subordination is actually socially constructed. Therefore, this women's subordination or men's domination can be put to an end (UNESCO Publications Board, 2011). Being born as a man or woman, for many generations has been associated with their respective masculine and feminine roles and values. Men are hunters and women are the caretakers. The movement against this believes has been a controversy for decades. Raising the awareness on the issues is also a challenge in the society.

Gender awareness is the ability to view society from the perspective of gender roles and understand how this has affected women's needs in comparison to the needs of men. Shortly, it is the capacity to identify and acknowledge that there are issues, differences, inequalities between men and women (UNESCO Publications Board, 2011).

### B. Gender Awareness in Maritime Education and Training (MET)

Gender awareness challenges stereotypical preconceptions, of which many of the students and teachers are the carriers. Stereotypes, especially gender ones, are highly resistant to changes, and gender separation in education is highly resilient (Charles & Bradley, 2002). These stereotypes are easily reconciled with the idea of being 'equal but different', finding widespread social acceptance that they are difficult to contrast, that cause individuals do not recognize them as discriminatory. When making gender-coding visible and enlightening what effects it has on women, it is like drawing attention to women and put them at the center. This is an uncomfortable situation that can be seen as provocative by some people. There is a common opinion that gender issues are irrelevant for certain subject, or perhaps impossible.

The result of the study conducted (Cars & Osterman, 2015) shows that gender issues are not explicitly mentioned or addressed in any of the course plans and identified study in maritime education, which indicates

a lack of clear strategies for the issues. The content and learning objectives for maritime education are mostly determined by the STCW Convention, set up by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). This convention is the main source of reference for maritime education all over the globe. For example, all study plans include references to maritime safety, watchkeeping duties, and other professional responsibilities. Various kinds of cultural awareness studies are included, at least mentioned among the learning objectives. This cultural awareness seems to be limited to differences in national cultures, like the differences between oriental and occidental cultures. References to a wider perspective of culture that covers age, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation – commonly used for studies in social sciences, is not visible. There seems to be 'gender blindness' in maritime education. Most likely, it is due to the fact that historically maritime industry has been a male-dominated world (Cars & Osterman, 2015). Especially in technical oriented education, marine engineering department, for example.

Bringing up gender issue to the surface may not be appreciated or accepted. The idea could sound ridiculous and unnecessary to both male and female students, and perhaps to the teachers as well. This can be due to the adaptation of a new identity when the female enter a male-dominated education, to be one of the boys, while celebrating womanhood at the same time. Gender awareness challenges stereotypical preconceptions, where many of the students and the teachers are the bearers. Gender stereotypes are highly resistant to changes, gender segregation in education are highly resilient (Charles & Bradley, 2002). They are easily reconciled with the idea of being equal but different, leading individuals to perceive it as natural and not discriminatory. Making gender-coding visible will put the spotlight on women. This is unusual and uncomfortable, or worse, is perceived as provocative.

In a study conducted about women seafarer at sea (Kitada, 2013) it was identified that there are three prominent subsets of norms and values on board ships: an emphasis on hiding emotions and feelings, the importance of jokes, and the prioritization of the requirements of the job over the needs of the individuals. These features reflect more masculine norms and values than in most shore-based cultures, greatly demanding women seafarers to adjust to them when entering seafaring environment.

It turns out that increasing number of female students who choose maritime education will not alone resolve gender bias in maritime industry. Gender issues must be well define (Cars & Osterman, 2015). There needs to be awareness among teachers, staffs, even the students to make a difference. Gender is a sensitive area, yet it is almost invisible. To work on making things right needs convincing that there is something wrong. Almost everyone is sharing common cultural background, an unwritten agreement of how to live, depending on whether you are male or female. It often hard to accept that those differences are actually constructions of cultural and historical context, and not innate or tied to sex.

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods include interviews, analysis of documents and participant observation data in order to understand and explain social phenomena. The qualitative approach is best used for gender-specific research (Instraw) Interview is excellent for this study as the information gathered can be more complex and detailed, as well as personal. Focus group discussion is also commonly used when conducting research from a gender perspective. It involves the gathering of a pre-configured groups of participants. Just like the interviews, the discussion should also be structured.

The data for this study is primarily collected from the research participants: 35 the female students of Nautical Department in STIP. The technic used to collect the data is through interviews and a smaller focus group discussion to gather more in depth information on gender perspective. The interviews are structured and comprise of open-ended and close-ended questions. The responses expected from the open-ended questions are more detailed and personal. Hence, anonymity is guaranteed.

The participants then are divided into two categories, students who have sea-experience and students who haven't got any sea experience, yet. There are 30 students who have no sea experience and 6 senior students, who have got their sea experience for a completion of 12 months. A set of questions is prepared for the interviews. And a video picturing a real bridge situation is used as an aid to start the focus group discussion. The focus group discussion is conducted with the two groups of participants separately; those who have and who have not got sea experience.

The 6 experienced students were posted on different ships, ranging from domestic to ocean-going voyages. 4 students sailed on oil tankers, 1 on a gas tanker, and another 1 on a bulk carrier.

## RESULTS

Since this school is a merchant marine higher education institute, the graduates are prepared to work on merchant ships, mostly cargo ships. The crew on cargo ships are, so far, still dominated by male seafarers. Being in a male-dominated working environment for several months at sea is as well expected by the female students. They can be the only one female among 17 to 30 male crew. All the participants of this study are aware of that reality coming in their future career as seafarers. Both the non-experienced and the experienced group have known about it since they decided to enroll in the school selection tests.

### Perception on Gender Bias

All 35 participants agree that the even now, the school is already a male-dominated environment. The number of female future mariners studying here barely reaches 3% of the total population, with 35 students out of 1086 future seafarers. Hence, it is not surprising to find out that they have to adapt to the masculine

culture (Charles & Bradley, 2002) around the campus that they do not perceive any treatment or rules to be biased or discriminatory. No one of the participants was responsive when asked if they have been treated uncomfortably as female students.

Nothing has ever bothered me here. I came here to be a seafarer. I have to study and focus on my dream.  
(Female1, 1<sup>st</sup> year student)

This is a normative answer of all the participants. However, when given deeper question like what makes them uncomfortable in the classroom, the response is the 'boys talk thingy', and usually walk away to avoid listening to the talk. Yet, no one of the participants take it as an issue. They have perceived it as normal. It is them that need to adapt, as they have decided to join the school.

Referring to (Kitada, 2013) this attitude towards the environment is categorized as being negotiators, they first stage in women's strategies when enter the male-dominated environment. They learn to negotiate their gender identities to fit into the surrounding. "I know that the sea is not easy, I have to be strong, tough", stated a second-year student. Though, no one admitted that they have been hiding their feminine signs. Perhaps it's not that they did not want to admit, but they didn't realize that it has actually something to do with their being women among men in majority.

When they got on board, from the 6 participants, it was obvious that they felt uncomfortable to be seen as 'women' rather than 'seafarers' by other male crew. All the 6 participants stated that they avoided to look feminine in their appearance or behaviors. They packed clothes that could cover all their body: long-sleeved shirts and trousers. They were informed to do so by their senior female seafarers. It might not be appropriate to wear short-sleeved shirt or pants in front of men who have not seen women so often on board ships. A fourth-year student explained:

We got not only briefed by the female seniors about the outfits, but also from the crewing manager, that we should wear proper clothes. And by that I understood that long-sleeved shirt and trousers should be best. No tights, no curves, is safer. (Female30, 4<sup>th</sup> year student)

By doing so, they all were told to hide their femininity wishing that it would avoided them from being seen as sexual object and to be accepted as a fellow seafarer, instead.

Hiding feelings and emotion is another form of obscuring femininity. In their perspective as a beginner in seafaring industry it is a challenge that they have to overcome, as a consequence of choosing the career.

Yes, it is a male-dominated world. But I can be like them. More women are now becoming seafarers. I can do the job, no problem. Yes, sometimes I feel alone, and need to share my feelings, but there was only one woman there, me. I couldn't talk to the men about that. (Female32, 4<sup>th</sup> year student).

This stage is a little advanced according to Kitada (2013). This is where the female seafarers use the strategy of reinforcing masculinity and make themselves to behave like men. Among other participants, she is the only one with such responses. Others are still insecure and keep reminding themselves to be careful whenever they are on board ships.

I always make sure I lock my cabin door before I go to sleep. And put a table as a barrier, so I would know if anyone try to break in my cabin. (Female31, 4<sup>th</sup> year student).

All the sea-experienced participants have experienced sexual harassment, at least verbally. It was the most unwanted situation and most uncomfortable: being the only women among men in the middle of sea getting harassed.

There was a pump man who kept on acting weird to me. His behaviors were annoying to me. At first I just ignored that it might just my being guarded. Then I could stand it anymore, that I talked to the captain, who then sent him home. I should have believed in myself. (Female34, 4<sup>th</sup> year).

This one student didn't even feel comfortable mentioning what actually happened on board, she used the word weird to describe the harassment. And in the end still blamed herself, though a bit, by saying 'I should have believed in myself'. It must have been a serious breach that the captain had to send the pump man home during a voyage.

The experienced students have similar experiences while getting on board for their 12 month sea-training. In the beginning, when they started studying here, not all of them thought that this industry they are going to be in, is male-dominated. Then, even after some experiences, they are aware that it is male-dominated not only because most crew are man, but also the working culture has been masculine. However, they still perceive that hiding their femininity is part of the consequences of choosing to be seafarers.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the results of the study, it is found that the female students have experience discomfort due to being women among men, in a masculine environment. They boys joke and talks are one example of what they see many times in classrooms. Besides, sometimes this kind of dirty jokes come out of male lecturers. They learn to accept and adapt to it, take it as a kind of risks to take to be in seafaring industry.

Like the research conducted on women working in male-dominated jobs (Kitada, 2013), the experienced students also experience gender-related problems, including sexual harassment by other male crew on board. The gender-related problems were brought about by the working environment that reflects the occupational culture that embrace masculine norms and values, so intact that it is perceived like it was the nature of the occupation.



In terms of the strategies used in coping with the masculine environment at sea, most participants have used the negotiators strategies. Many women began with a negotiator strategy when they started working on board and realized that they need to adjust to the work and living environment of a ship (Kitada, 2013). Awareness is needed to be able to grow and step to shift from one strategy to the next one, from negotiator to constructor to maintainer and finally reproducers, where they are comfortable of themselves as women seafarers. It is part of the responsibility of the Maritime Education Training (MET) to bring this awareness to surface, not only to female students, but also the male students. They are going to be colleagues on board, soon. Understanding the seafaring culture is essential for both male and female students, teachers, and school management, as well as for other stakeholders in the industry. Social and cultural aspects of seafaring jobs could impact seafarers' lives at sea. It cannot be underrated.

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