

Investigating the Experience of a Female Seafarer through a Gender Photo Lens

Banun Havifah Cahyo Khosiyono¹, Ista Maharsi², Mia Fitria Agustina³
Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa¹, Universitas Islam Indonesia², Universitas Jenderal Soedirman³

Correspondence: banuna.havifah90@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article examines how a woman seafarer uses an image to create her identity and struggles in a male-dominated job. Photovoice and online interviews were used to gather data. While the purpose of the interview was to gather the narratives, the SHOWeD approach helped her think about the picture. Content analysis was used to examine the data to find themes and recount the tales of her identity creation. The results demonstrate that while regulations have been put in place to safeguard women working on ships and to ensure that male and female seafarers have equivalent workloads, there is no assurance that harassment and discrimination won't happen. The male counterpart's unfavorable stigmatization of women working on ships regrettably confirms that women seafarers continue to be a high-stakes profession with possible hazards. One important identity construction that emerges is that women seafarers do not pursue careers that last a lifetime because other jobs are seen as more fulfilling, such working in an office and raising children.

Keywords: *experience, gender, photovoice, SHOWeD method, woman seafarers*

INTRODUCTION

Investigation as such is of significant relevance to express the unheard requirements of women because of the uncommon and underappreciated roles they play in the fishing industry and the maritime industry in research (Khosiyono, et al, 2021). Women's careers in this industry seem to go unnoticed and unappreciated because sailing the oceans has long been perceived as a male-dominated occupation. Additionally, a significant factor restricting the number of female workers in the maritime sector is a lack of awareness and information (Mukherjee, 2019). Gender equality is still an issue that needs to be resolved today because

women who work in the maritime business still experience discrimination (Wu, Chen, Ye, & Ho, 2017). Many perception barriers prevent women from working, especially in managerial roles (Pastra, Koufopoulos & Gkliatis 2015; Kunaepi, et al., 2024). The International Maritime Organization (IMO) launched the "Strategy on the Integration of Women in the Maritime Sector" in 1988 to increase the participation and advancement of women in the maritime industry as a result of the imbalanced career development opportunities between men and women in that sector (IMO, 2021). The IMO Assembly passed a resolution at the conclusion of 2019 calling for more forceful action in the ensuing years to improve gender equality in the maritime industry and create a barrier-free environment (IMO, 2020). In many regions of the world, this impression is still widespread, and it is still challenging to determine the exact number of female mariners (Khosiyono, et al., 2019). The purpose of this study is to illustrate a woman seafarer's experience working aboard a ship through photovoice and to highlight the gender bias that exists in the industry against women.

In a job where men predominate, Kitada and Langaker (2017) contend that women seafarers may be viewed as a risk factor on board ships due to their gender. Women who work as cadets, police, sailors, carpenters, and engineers are among the minority of women in the workforce (Zhao et al., 2017). An essential multidisciplinary research field that can improve the efficiency of marine operations and management is gender perspectives in the maritime sector (Kitada, Pineiro, & Mejia, 2019). The literature on gender issues in maritime education and training (Dragomir, 2018), gender discrimination and sexual harassment (Pineiro & Kitada, 2020), policies (Kitada & Tansey, 2018), identities (Kitada, 2010), leadership (Kitada, William & Froholdt, 2015), careers and work-life balance are all covered in the field of maritime gender studies (Kitada & Harada, 2019). This research is useful for understanding how gender prejudices are perpetuated in the design of nautical employment, which in turn affects how we think and act. Given these extensive histories and the fact that the culture of ships has been referred to as the realm of masculine norms and values, it follows that women seafarers must demonstrate masculine behavior to survive (Belcher et al, 2003). According to Guo & Liang (2012), women seafarers could gain from a more inviting workplace if they can act differently in the male-dominated environment, such as paying attention to details and being polite. Bearing those in mind, this study is aimed to describe woman seafarer struggle in the male-dominated workplace, and to describe woman seafarer construct her identity.

A collective and social identity based on feminist principles is gender identity (Henderson-King & Stewart 1999). Gender identity, according to Diamond, is "the sex, male or female, that we perceive ourselves to be" (1977, p. 13). Bem (1974), who presents the possibilities of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny for gender identification, more precisely defines this term. The phrase "sexual identity," on the other hand, relates to sexual orientation, such as heterosexual, bisexual, gay, and lesbian (Stacey, 1993).

The phrase "women seafarers" is used in this study to highlight two concerns. The first is female mariners' "sex." Their sex is important in this context because the business is mainly male-dominated and women are still considered as a rare or unusual case when they enter the shipping industry. The "gender" of female mariners is the second. The culture of ships is frequently seen as a mirror of masculine standards and ideals. Women seafarers may even feel "forced" to adopt masculine behaviors on board by the expectations and conventions of the maritime workplace culture to "survive" or thrive (Belcher et al., 2003). This may have a substantial effect on the identities of female sailors at work and home.

Concerning gender issues, this study places women's activities as the focus/subject, emphasizes cooperative group work as the primary working mode, liberation from oppression, identification of issues affecting women, and development of solutions, a dynamic process among people and activities, and respect for women's theories and experiences (Yanti, Usman, & Bahrun, 2023; Linander & Sandberg, 2024). In other words, women are seen as being respectful, liberated, independent, empowering, and actualizing themselves through the process of knowledge creation.

The experiences of female seafarers who have job experience on the ship are examined using the Photovoice approach. We employed a narrative methodology for this investigation, an approach that focuses on how people organize and communicate about their lives through storytelling (Reismann, 1993; Sandelowski, 1991). With special attention paid to how participants built feminine identities, we examined how participants organized their tales and used literary strategies to highlight the most significant aspects of their experiences (Elliott, 2005). Participants' sensemaking concentrates on the aspects of the story that happened before and after the difficult action when it is predetermined.

To encourage critical debate of the topics under discussion through images, to assist participants reflect on and record their concerns, and to disseminate and inform

policymakers, photovoice is used. A three-stage procedure should be used while gathering data: choosing images, placing what is seen in the photographs and the stories in context, and codifying themes and pertinent theories (Wang & Burris, 1997). Sutton-Brown (2014) describes the data collection procedures, which she has modified from Wang's stages of data collection: identifying a target audience and participants, introducing the photovoice methodology through group discussion, obtaining informed consent, deciding on photo themes, distributing cameras and going over how to use them, allowing participants time to take photos, and discussing the photos. Meanwhile, for assisting the participants to frame their stories, Wang (1999) proposes the SHOWeD procedures that stand for:

What do you See here?

What is really Happening here?

How does this relate to Our lives?

Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?

What can we Do about it?

This study utilized a two-stage photovoice developed by Wang and Burris (1997), they are training and photovoice focus group discussion that is presented at **Table 1**.

Table 1. The procedures of photovoice project

No.	Photovoice Components	Photovoice Procedures
1.	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ethic approval-consent to be a participant of the research and take pictures. ● Training to capture female seafarers' experience working on ship (cannot be done because of Covid-19). ● Sending participants' private picture collection when working on the ship, then some pictures are shorted (based on research questions). ● Training to take pictures at home which represent the condition on the ship (analogy), for example, taking a picture of a flower which is placed in the farthest corner of a garden representing the participant's feeling working alone on the ship. ● Training to make captions of the photos using SHOWED.
2.	Photovoice focus group discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussing photovoice data. ● Interviewing A through WhatsApps (voice notes) to get more data from photovoice. ● Interviewing B through WhatsApps (voice notes) to get more clarification from interviewing A.

Debbie, a pseudonym for Debbie, a female seafarer employed as a Deck Officer III, is a participant in this study. She works for the Indonesian Shipping Company on passenger ships. WhatsApp and online interviews were used to gather data. The participant and the researcher had two online meetings. The initial meeting's goals are to explain the photovoice

assignment, get signed authorization, and gather demographic data. In order to illustrate the tale of how female seafarers fight in male-dominated jobs and build their identities, the participant is asked to take a series of images. Participants submit photos from the ships as well as additional home-taken photos at the second gathering.

We used a gender relations lens to examine the data, focusing on how women build their gender identities, how women are described as feminine, and how difficult it is for them to work on a ship. To get a sense of the stories as a whole, we started by reading and rereading the narratives. The manner that photographs assisted the participants in telling their experience and provided depth and scope to the narrative is what makes them useful in the analytical process rather than as independent data.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this Photovoice project are a synthesis of the data collected through photographs and the reflections or responses of the participants to the SHOWeD method. The participant was asked to be thoughtful in her approach when taking photographs of female seafarer's working experience. Overall, she was very insightful about taking photographs that were meaningful to them and was also able to provide verbal reflections on how the photographs represented the topic for the given session. The ultimate themes that emerged from the Photovoice project and interview results included regulation for women's protection working on ships (IMO), equal working load for both men and women, requirements for working on ships, especially mental preparation, seafarers as male-dominated working place, A (Being women seafarers is fine but not a good choice for later stage career), B (Being women seafarers are not a good choice), safe working environment for women seafarers may occur when there is strong historical and family-like connection among them, women seafarers are high-risk profession, family-work time is a potential problem, and negative stigma of women working in ships.

Female Seafarers on Ships: Regulation, Working Loads, and the Profession

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has a regulation for the protection of women seafarers. IMO has developed a program called the Integration of Women in the Maritime Sector (IWMS) since 1988. This program has made both global and regional

impacts on promoting women seafarers. IMO also has seven regional associations of Women of Maritime (WIMA). Therefore, women seafarers must be optimistic for career development as women seafarers. This was expressed by Participant A in the interview data as follows.

Today, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has protection regulations for female seafarers. The women seafarers are safer for their future work. Therefore, the prospect of women seafarers is more hopeful and the expectation is that there is more demand for women seafarers. (Debby, WhatsApp Interview, March 8, 2024)

In addition, gender equality issues have become interesting topics to be addressed on ships. regarding duties and responsibilities, there is no indication of discrimination. This was expressed by Debby in the interview data as follows.

In terms of gender equality, women on the ships have the same rights and obligations according to their respective jobs. There is no difference between men and women. The example I work as a Chief Officer III, and my job is by my main task as Chief Officer III. Therefore, women or men have the same responsibility, it doesn't make any difference. (Debby, WhatsApp Interview, March 8, 2024)

To meet the requirements for a career on ships, both physical and mental strength, and cognitive, and communicative skills are crucial. More importantly, women seafarers must have good mental preparation for future duty. This was expressed by the participant in the interview data as follows.

But tomorrow, I don't imagine that I have to be separated from my 3-month-old child and then just meet for a month on land. So, I really have to prepare mentally. That's why now I really spend time with my family, especially with my child. (Debby, WhatsApp Interview, March 8, 2024)

Negative Stigma of Women Working on Ships and the Potential Threats

Despite the equal tasks and responsibilities among male and female staff working on ships, there remains a negative perception of women working on ships. The different perceptions may be influenced by the culture, beliefs, and facts on the field. The stigma that seafarers are the profession suited to the male world is also found in this study.



Figure 1. Debby and her colleagues

This was shown at **Figure 1.** and expressed by the participants in the interview data as follows.

Mostly male domination. If you are in your 40s and over, many women choose to work on land, such as in the transportation service or at the ship company office on land, miss. In the future, I will probably prefer that. (Debby, WhatsApp Interview, March 8, 2024)

This study reveals that women seafarers have a negative stigma from other people. This was expressed by Participant A in the interview data as follows.

The effect of working as a woman seafarer is that it is difficult to get married, except married with fellow professions or married to foreigners. Women rarely enjoy being different from men when working on a ship with lots of fun. Working men are shipped with a lot of salary. Women also have a lot of money but their image is bad, Indonesian society. Most of the women working on the ship are not married. The woman's status is a widow or an old virgin. (Debby, WhatsApp Interview, March 8, 2024)

Although there have been protection regulations and greater opportunities for women who work as seafarers on ships, the population remains low worldwide. With particular working sectors in ships such as cruisers and ferries, the distribution of the population of women seafarers varies according to regions, countries, and sectors (Belcher, 2003). However, there is a demanding need for shipping companies to consider women seafarers' safety in their competencies, knowledge and experiences on the ship.

Moreover, living on the sea tends to be a man's world. Facing obstacles in the middle of nowhere is considered impossible to be conducted by women. It would be very rare for women to get into the seafaring career and be recognized. However, there are still women facing the wave of resistance. Women became more courageous, determined, and challenged

to equal men if not surpass in the seafaring profession instead of being disappointed and discouraged to pursue the career.

Debby who has been working on a ship for 6 years with her rank as Chief Officer III in the ship has learned a lot of benefits and challenges of women working as seafarers. The fact that she is the only woman working in the ship may have given her priceless stories to tell about women seafarer careers. She indicates that women seafarers are a high-risk profession. Potential sexual harassment on ships and inter-colleague affairs are more a threat than a myth. This was expressed by the participants in the interview data as follows.

If it used to be very risky. There are many of sexual harassment on board. Many women sell themselves or are raped by their male friends on the ship to satisfy their lust, miss. Now there are still cases like that. Alhamdulillah, on the ship I worked safely. This is a ship owned by the government. So, the regulations are much more regulated. Moreover, this is a domestic ship, not a cross-country ship. (Debby, WhatsApp Interview, March 8, 2024)

Regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religious minority, and employees with disability, sexual harassment in the workplace could occur to anyone working in the environment. Saline (2018) argues that bullying in workplaces may occur prevalently in specific industries and sectors, not in the workplace as a whole. This study has revealed that ships may not be safe working places and convenient career development for women. The war against sexual harassment in the workplace requires an appropriate legal framework to be set up to combat it, in all of its forms, before it reaches the category of criminal (United Nations, 2010).

Additionally, the literature on gendered bodies and space places a focus on the sexualization of public space, which lends support to these findings (Bryant, 2006; Bryant & Hoon, 2006). Women's safety, but more specifically women's fear, has been one of the main themes of this literature. Additionally, spaces about some serious assaults and sexual harassment instances should serve as a daily reminder to women (Koskela, 1999). Additionally, there are a lot of sexually explicit instances in public, which leads to sexualized public spaces where the female body is portrayed as an eroticized symbol (Bergman & Lynggard, 2004). Although she believes that she works in a safe working environment in the ship, her condition is nonetheless due to her history of having a father who used to work in the ship and that some personnels in the ship have known her well. More importantly, her husband who also works in the same ship may generate a different perspective of safe working places.

“Someday I will not be the Woman on the Ship Anymore”: Female Seafarer is not a Lifelong Career

Debby has been working as a seafarer for 6 years and during her time she has been the only woman on the ships to date. Working with men as colleagues has urged her to become a strong woman as she eventually managed to have a good position on the ship company. When she was asked to pick a photograph that can reflect herself as a female seafarer, she took a photo of a flower in her garden. The following are her photo and the description of how she sees herself.



Figure 2. A picture that reflects her identity

I looked at the plants and flowers around my house when I noticed a pink bougainvillea which urged me to take a photo of it. That blooming flower represented me as a female sailor who longs for female coworkers. I am currently working as Commander III in an Indonesian ship. There are many joys and sorrows of working as a woman. Moreover, I am the only woman who works on this ship; hence, if there are female cadets apprenticed, I like it. I work in the navigation section. My duties are based on office hours. I also check and clean the ship's equipment. The captain on my ship happened to be a friend of my late father. Hence, on the ship he was like my father. My friends are also like brothers or sisters to me. The initial challenge working on ship was adapting myself with seasickness, colds, tired of night duty, and lack of sleep. Missing my mother, longing to chat and hanging out with my female friends are also common. At first, I felt lonely for a long time, yet it is normal. Now, I have enjoyed my work. I am used to it.

What influences the views of Debby about appropriate careers for women and men is their perception of gendered space in which they construct their identity and spaces in relation to masculinity and femininity (Andrews, 2016). Debby believes that being women seafarers may suit the most as male career opportunities. In addition, Debby has planned for

not being a woman seafarer in the future as she also believes that women are better off working on ships. In relation to this, Debby's views represent their beliefs of what is perceived as an appropriate career for women and men in relation to gendered space concepts (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003). Hence, social identity construction is not merely shaped by an individual but also the community at large that bears a particular concept of what is appropriate or not.

Both Debby's statements may be true regarding the events that occurred on ships such as sexual harassment and other gender issues on ships. Debby highlighted that safe working environments for female seafarers may occur when there is strong historical and family-like connection among them as is indicated in the interview data as follows.

As I told you earlier, yes, we were on the ship like family. The captain is like my own father. The older male friends were like brothers to me and the younger ones like my younger siblings. They also tell me. Even though I am a woman myself, I feel safe sis. Feel protected by all of them. Alhamdulillah, my place of work is safe for women to work on ships. (Debby, WhatsApp Interview, March 8, 2024)

Another potential problem of being female seafarers is the working time. This was expressed by Debby in the interview data as follows.

My husband and I work on a ship, so we work on ships at the same time and take 1 month off on land with Ms. So, thank God I can arrange the time, which time to work and which time for your family. But tomorrow, I don't imagine that you have to be separated from a 3-month-old child and then just meet for a month on land. So, you really have to prepare mentally. That's why now I really spend time with my family, especially with my child, sis. (Debby, WhatsApp Interview, March 8, 2024)

Naturally, women have motherhood characteristics. They tend to sacrifice their passion to raise their family. When the family is getting bigger, far away from the family is the last choice. This somehow holds female seafarers to carry on their careers. The first participant has also mentioned managing family time which is harder when she has a three-month-old baby. She described that it is fine when she only has a husband, but it is harder when the family grows up having a baby. This is why it might be difficult for a woman to maintain her career as a seafarer. Her calling to work on the ship collides with her natural calling as a mother and wife.

Women's values toward family and work are uncertain, according to academics (Abbas et al, 2023). It is acknowledged that women may have a sense of liberation when they are released from having to adhere to a rigid work schedule, and this flexibility may allow them to have more influence over their lives (Salmi, 1993). Women's ownership of the home has led to a new appreciation for their domestic tasks, as feminist geographers have also demonstrated. The women in this study prioritized their families and homes because they had been conditioned to believe that a good mother is one who stays at home and spends a lot of time with her kids (Christensen 1993). A seafarer's fate is that once they are aboard, they are unable to see their family (2003). They should remain on board while on duty regardless of what happens to their family, which is a rule for nautical occupations. Consequently, one of the biggest challenges for women in the maritime business is the difficulty of juggling work and family (Aggrey, 2000). This might be even more difficult for female mariners who must spend several months apart from their family while on board (Kitada 2012).

Women who work full-time frequently struggle to strike a balance between work and family, especially if they have children since they are frequently expected to conform to the gender roles that society expects of them (Klugman et al. 2014). As a result, as a woman's work develops, the stress on her marriage grows as well, which makes her feel guilty and hinders her ability to advance in her career (Farber, 1996). These areas of work and life could cross over and have an impact on one another. It is well known that women participate more actively in such negotiations about workplace policies than do males (Scully, 2009). It is claimed that when women, in particular, are caught between their personal and professional lives, identity is subject to negotiation. Such a situation may, in a broader sense, raise the question of whether to prioritize work or housework.

Raising children on ships is not considered a solvable solution. There are some reasons for it. The first is the ship's environment. It is discussed that sexual harassment could be a treat living on ship. Thus, with that kind of condition, children might not get what they want and need to equip themselves. In the golden age, children should be placed in an environment which helps them to learn and grow. On a boat, nevertheless, seeing someone harassing a woman might not be a good example that it can be dangerous when the children, later, think that it is what a man commonly does. The second reason is most of the time a woman

seafarer is used to working if they are on the ship. There will not be enough attention fulfilling the needs of their children. Although a room is provided especially for ones who have a position, it could be inadequate for children's development. Children need space to grow, and staying in a room almost all day long becomes not a good way for them. Moreover, for female seafarers who do not get a private room for themselves, the problem is doubled. The next thing is the possibility of having someone to be with the children during office hours. The person might help a lot in accompanying the children.

Besides, the temptation to work off shore also intrigues women not achieving a higher career, to be a captain. Debby also plans to work offshore in the future. She mentions that many of her female friends work in offices related to shipping, for example, department of transportation or in ship company offices. There is a possibility to be a lecturer too. Once a woman seafarer, she can transfer the knowledge through formal education; moreover, if she could upgrade herself to meet the requirements as a lecturer (doctorate degree). This plan was also conducted by Debby. She revealed that she is pursuing her vocation degree (from Diploma 3 to Diploma 4) when she has time. This common thought might prevent women from gaining careers as women seafarers.

CONCLUSION

This research offers insights for gender-related workplace researchers who may be interested in using the Photovoice and narrative method with marginalized communities. Photovoice is one qualitative research strategy that can serve as a useful, participatory research tool to work with marginalized communities in naming their own experience. The research found that women seafarers on ships experienced gender-related problems including female seafarers on ships consisting of regulation, working loads, and the profession; and negative stigma of women working in ships. Based on the results of the photovoice and interviews with a woman seafarer and a man seafarer, their gender-related problems were brought about by the working environment which reflects the occupational culture embracing masculine norms and values. In order to fit into such a male-oriented culture on board ships, women seafarers learned by themselves and invented various identity management strategies. IMO also has some regulations for women seafarers, therefore there is a good future career for women seafarers in the International maritime workplace.

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