



Caring for seafarers
around the world

Women Seafarers Report 2022

**Beyond the 2%,
Women Seafarers and their Lives at Sea:
Reflecting on Our Call to Care**



Foreword

In 2019, a port chaplain met a female seafarer on board a ship. As a result of this encounter, he began to think about whether there are ways The Mission to Seafarers could support and assist female seafarers. One idea was to set up an online support group for women seafarers, but our initial research showed that there are several existing peer support groups. We decided not to duplicate these efforts but instead think more deeply about this important issue because it raises questions for us:

How can the Mission better support women seafarers and do we as a maritime welfare organisation truly understand what life at sea is like for women?

A small group of chaplains attended the 2019 World Maritime University (WMU) International Women's Conference in Malmö. The conference theme was 'Empowering Women in the Maritime Community' and the conference was both inspirational and informative. It was encouraging to meet so many women from many different countries and cultures, who are working in the maritime industry, both in sea going and shore side roles.

Later that year, we continued our deliberations at The Mission to Seafarers Australia regional conference. The Mission staff and volunteers from Australia had so many ideas, suggestions, and experiences to share, and so it was decided that we needed to do more in-depth research and ask ourselves how we could improve our response to the needs of women seafarers.

A first draft of this report was written in 2020, but then unfortunately the report took a back seat because of the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic is still being experienced by seafarers, but we feel that this is now an opportune time to reflect on the experiences of women at sea so that we can respond to their specific needs as we go forward with our work post-covid.

This is not a single project or a one-off exercise for the Mission, but an ongoing discussion which will help us learn about the needs of the seafarers we serve in all their diversity and help us to respond to those needs. It is very easy to keep providing the kinds of support for seafarers that we have always provided, but our discussions have highlighted the need for us to challenge ourselves and see if there are ways in which we can improve the care and support that we offer.

In this report we have used the terms women seafarers and female seafarers. For us this includes women whose gender identity matches the gender assigned to them at birth (cisgender), trans women and female identifying seafarers. The report does not address any specific issues about trans women seafarers. A future project may wish to give this issue further consideration.

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Executive Summary

For many years, Governments, NGO's and other organisations within the maritime sector have recognised the urgent need to increase the number of women working in both sea going and shore side roles.

There are many initiatives and networks that seek to attract women to the maritime industry and that support and empower women through their careers. Despite these initiatives, women are still under-represented in the maritime industry. The IMO reports that women represent only 2% of the world's estimated 1.6 million² seafarers but there is real hope that this will change.³

The maritime industry continues to work for change and there are women's maritime organisations, women's networks and various educational and professional initiatives that provide the peer support and learning opportunities women need in order to help them overcome the barriers that they still encounter within this industry. Change is happening, albeit slowly.

It is quite clear that women seafarers face real challenges, and these challenges create barriers that are still difficult to overcome. Using existing literature and published research, this report highlights some of the main difficulties that women still encounter. The report also considers specific challenges which women encounter on three kinds of vessels: cargo ships, cruise ships and superyachts.

The report aims to act as a discussion document for The Mission to Seafarers and other maritime welfare providers. It is hoped that the report will help us to reflect on our relationship with women seafarers, the care that we provide to them and how we might shape our services for the future so that we meet the needs of the women seafarers who visit ports and our centres around the world. This has become even more crucial with the Covid pandemic which has seen seafarers stranded in countries around the world, having their contracts extended and not being able to take shore leave. The problems faced by women seafarers may well be exacerbated by the pandemic.

The Mission to Seafarers has been providing practical and spiritual help to seafarers for over one hundred years. Everyday our chaplains, staff and volunteers visit ships all

over the world providing emotional support, friendship and a listening ear to seafarers who may be thousands of miles away from home. Our centres provide a place where seafarers can have much needed respite from their ships and a chance to connect with family and friends via the free wi-fi which we provide. We know that seafarers need our support, but we need to ask if there is more specific support that we can provide for women seafarers.



The report explores some of the key challenges that women seafarers face so that we can then reflect on these and identify ways that the Mission can respond to their specific needs. As an international organisation we are well placed to discuss these challenges and share ideas within our global Mission family. This report will hopefully act as a catalyst and help people generate ideas which can then be implemented across the Mission family. We invite Mission staff and volunteers to reflect on the contents and send in their comments, questions, and ideas to their regional director. Hopefully as we gather our ideas, we will be able to identify new ways of supporting the women who work on oceans across the world.

² According to the ICS, the worldwide population of seafarers serving on internationally trading merchant ships is estimated at 1,647,500 seafarers, of which 774,000 are officers and 873,500 are ratings. www.ics-shipping.org/shipping-fact/shipping-and-world-trade-global-supply-and-demand-for-seafarers/ [Accessed 8/3/21]

³ www.imo.org/en/OurWork/TechnicalCooperation/Pages/WomenInMaritime.aspx [Accessed 8/2/21]

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1 —

The Maritime Industry and the Issue of Gender

It is a well-known fact that the maritime industry is predominantly male, but this is gradually changing as more and more women seek both shore based and seagoing careers.

As this change becomes more apparent in the maritime work force, it may lead to questions about the provision of maritime welfare and whether maritime welfare agencies need to provide more focused support for women seafarers. Is there anything we can do differently? Are there ways in which we can be more responsive to the specific needs of women seafarers? Are we clear about what those needs are?

These questions are being asked at a time of great change and pressure on the maritime industry and on seafarers themselves. The COVID-19 pandemic has given these questions a sharper edge as both male and female seafarers encounter new welfare needs arising from the challenges of the pandemic.

It can be easy to overlook the specific needs of women seafarers and think that the provision of seafarer centres, transportation and chaplaincy are a sufficient welfare response, because this is what maritime welfare agencies have always done and these services are still vital. However, we do need to recognise that the issue of gender and women's social and economic development is a major priority at international levels. This makes it incumbent upon us as providers of spiritual care and welfare, to ask ourselves some questions:

What are the needs of women seafarers and are we doing all that we can to meet those needs?

How can our various services and spiritual care support the economic and social development of women seafarers?

Women and Issues of Gender at International Levels

The lives of women have long been a major concern at international levels. United Nations (UN) data shows that women make up the majority of the world's poor and illiterate.⁴ When women are in work, they tend to earn

significantly less money than men and often receive no payment for the work they do, in particular their domestic labour, such as cooking, cleaning, and child and elderly caring. In July 2010, the UN General Assembly established UN Women, a new UN agency set up to accelerate progress in gender equality and the empowerment of women.⁵ In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were adopted by all United Nations Member States as a universal call for action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. There is also a specific goal to address the social and economic development of women.⁶ At the international level there is a clear push for gender equality but what does this mean for us at The Mission to Seafarers?

Does the international push for gender equality have any implications for the ways in which we work and minister?

Is there anything we can do to support the growing numbers of women seafarers?

Within the maritime sector, both the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the World Maritime University (WMU) are responding to the issue of gender inclusion by setting out a clear rationale for the training and employment of women in the maritime sector and by producing research to support this. Both institutions have developed a range of programmes and events that have enabled maritime organisations across the world to share learning, expertise, and best practices on gender empowerment. For example, in June 2019 the IMO theme for World Maritime Day was "Empowering Women in the Maritime Sector." This international leadership is vital if there is going to be lasting change especially in the cargo sector where change has been slow.

The maritime industry can be both challenging and exciting to work in. It is a dynamic and fast-moving industry and a place where both shoreside and sea going roles can provide a wholesome and meaningful career. Seagoing roles have

⁴ Intro Global Gender Inequality, SDG Academy X: HR001Human Rights, Human Wrongs: Challenging Poverty, Vulnerability and Social Exclusion, and see www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures [Accessed 15/2/21]

⁵ www.unwomen.org/en

⁶ SDG 5 is 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.'

traditionally been seen as jobs for men and it is taking the sector far too long to address this damaging perception. The IMO reports that women represent only 2% of the world's 1.2 million seafarers and 94 % of these women are working in the cruise industry.⁷ Only a third of global shore-based maritime positions are filled by women.⁸

The Benefits of Gender Diversity

There are several studies that show that gender diversity benefits organisations. Companies that achieve diversity and inclusion, and manage this well, attain better financial results, on average, than other companies.⁹ At a very fundamental level, achieving gender diversity and inclusion means that companies will access a much larger pool of talent which ultimately would then lead to better performance. In an industry such as shipping, which is subject to so much technological development and international regulation, it would make sense for companies to look for the best employees and retain them within the work force.

The maritime industry has recognized that more needs to be done to attract and retain women. In 1988 the IMO established the Women in Maritime program which seeks to *'support gender equality and the empowerment of women through gender specific fellowships; by facilitating access to high-level technical training for women in the maritime sector in developing countries; by creating the environment in which women are identified and selected for career development opportunities in maritime administrations, ports and maritime training institutes; and by facilitating the establishment of professional women in maritime associations, particularly in developing countries.'*¹⁰ This initiative includes the establishment of seven regional associations across the world covering 70 countries. It is hoped that together with other initiatives, access to these associations could go some way to narrowing some of the institutional barriers and cultural stigma that women seafarers may face.

The World of Seafaring

Seafaring is hard and demanding work and for the vast majority of seafarers it involves long hours, long temporary contracts, little job security and very little employment protection. All of these issues have been exacerbated by the global Covid pandemic with many seafarers having their contracts extended when crew changes cannot take place. Despite the hard work of the ITF and other unions, union involvement is often regarded with suspicion and many seafarers fear that joining a union could result in blacklisting.

The internationalisation of shipping can be a benefit, but globalisation has brought with it a kind of fracturing of relationship within the industry.

*'The outsourcing of labour supply as a response to the globalisation of the industry and the labour market has had a manifestly negative impact upon the terms and conditions of employment for seafarers, and has further distanced them from employers...'*¹¹

Personal contact between seafarers and ship owners is practically non-existent and these relationships are generally managed through shipping agencies. This means that employment issues are largely left to the agent and the individual seafarer. In some cases, this might work well but where there are problems, this fracturing of employment relationships erodes the responsibility that the ship owner should have for the people working on their ship. Examples of this fracturing is evidenced in the issues of seafarer abandonment and unpaid wages. Despite these difficulties, hundreds of women and men graduate from maritime institutions each year, keen to have a seagoing career despite the challenges of the job. It is a career that can be both rewarding and exciting.

Ships come under the legal jurisdiction of their flag state, but the inspection and regulation of ships is largely the responsibility of the port state and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). When inspections do take place, they largely focus on technical and structural issues and not always on the quality of the working environment unless there is a specific complaint. This means that many seafarers need the support of welfare agencies and the unions when they encounter difficulties on board. Some shipping companies have very clear policies on employment issues and issues such as harassment and discrimination, but they can be hard to implement or enforce. It can be daunting for any seafarer male or female, to raise complaints about harassment or other kinds of poor treatment. The establishment of robust and effective reporting procedures and preventative measures is an urgent task for nation states and shipping companies.¹²

There isn't a substantial body of research about the experiences of women seafarers and their working environment. The research, articles and reports that do exist show that gender stereotypes and discrimination against women seafarers still persists. This discrimination affects working conditions, access to education and training, and access to career opportunities. Despite the challenges of gender discrimination, there are outstanding women seafarers working in the shipping industry and good role

¹⁰ www.imo.org/en/OurWork/TechnicalCooperation/Pages/WomenInMaritime.aspx [Accessed 15/2/21]

¹¹ Sampson, H (2013) *International Seafarers and Transnationalism in the Twenty-First Century*, Manchester University Press, Manchester p 4

¹² Carballo Pineiro, L and Kitada, M (2020) Sexual harassment and women seafarers: The role of laws and policies to ensure occupational safety & health, *Marine Policy*, 117, doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2020.103938

models, and success stories exist in every sector of the industry.¹³ These role models and champions demonstrate that it is possible for women to have rewarding careers at sea.

The Challenge of Life at Sea: The Concept of Liminality.

Seafarers live in two different worlds, the world of sea and the world of shore. These two different worlds have different norms and values. Some researchers have used the concept of 'liminality' to explain these two different worlds. Ships are regarded as liminal spaces because they are places where crews are physically and emotionally removed from the ties and constraints of their homes and families.¹⁴



This liminality can exacerbate the challenges of living at sea but in some circumstances, it can actually help seafarers deal with the challenges of being away from home. Women seafarers find that they move between a male dominated environment at sea where they may encounter challenges because they are women, to the usual world of home where life goes on as normal, and the challenges of gender may be less acute. Of course, this does depend on the cultural context. Moving between the two different worlds of sea and shore can cause challenges for any seafarer and specific challenges for women seafarers.

Research highlights that women seafarers may behave differently in these liminal spaces, especially on cargo ships where they may be in the minority. They may defeminise their appearance, or swear more, or use much coarser language than they would use at home, all in an effort to adapt to a male dominated working environment and to fit in.¹⁵ Many women seafarers on cruise ships find that the nature of this liminal space opens them to risk of sexual harassment because they may occupy largely subordinate positions, but this may also happen on other vessels as well. Reflecting on the concept of liminality, Revd Mark Lawson-Jones port chaplain in Wales says

*'For me, the liminality isn't always about a specific location, it can be about the way a position is perceived differently because the holder is a woman. Of course, each woman captain I've spoken to tells me a story of needing to prove themselves constantly, when their male counterparts don't need to do so.'*¹⁶

This idea of liminality and the way women seafarers respond is explored further below in other chapters.

Maritime Welfare and the Needs of Women seafarers

Seafarers are largely invisible to people ashore. Apart from regulation and inspection, country governments generally have a track record of doing very little to enhance seafarer welfare. The maritime welfare sector which mostly consists of charities and faith-based organisations, provides practical care for seafarers through an advanced network of chaplains, ship visitors, seafarer centres and transportation. These organisations provide a friendly welcome and real support for seafarers across the world. They are largely funded through public donations, partnerships and initiatives with unions and corporate sponsorship. The maritime sector is the only economic sector with such a self-funded, charitable welfare endeavour.

Maritime welfare support was traditionally developed to respond to the needs of male seafarers. Now that we are beginning to see a greater presence of women seafarers, welfare agencies need to ask themselves whether there is more that we can do to identify and meet the support needs of women seafarers? In order to answer that question those who work in the sector providing this much needed support need to understand the specific challenges women seafarers face. This will then enable us to shape our services and support so as to meet those needs.

¹³ World Maritime University, Empowering Women in the Maritime Community, Conference Report 24/9/2019 www.wmu.se/scholarly-books/wmu-empowering-women-in-the-maritime-community-conference-report [Accessed 30/9/2019]

¹⁴ Thomas, Bloor, Little, Sexual Risk Among Female Workers on Cruise Ships, *WMU J Marit. Affairs* (2013) 12:87–97 link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs13437-013-0037-6.pdf [Accessed 15/2/21]

¹⁵ Kitada, M. *Women Seafarers and their Identities*. PhD Thesis, Cardiff University orca.cf.ac.uk/54387/ [Accessed 1/9/19]

¹⁶ Written statement from Revd Mark Lawson-Jones, Chaplain to the ports in Wales UK.

2 — Challenges and Barriers Across All Vessel Types

Both male and female seafarers experience a range of challenges when working at sea, but there are some challenges that are specific to women. Long contracts, months apart from family and friends, loneliness, isolation, job insecurity, risk of injury, and abandonment are issues that affect all seafarers, but women seafarers also face challenges that arise from the predominantly male working environment of the shipping industry.

These challenges are not insurmountable, but they illustrate the vital need for change within the maritime industry because they act as barriers and can deter women from seeking roles at sea. They can also discourage women from remaining in seafaring careers, resulting in a loss of much needed expertise and skills. The following challenges may be experienced by women on any type of vessel.

Maritime Education and Training

There is clear evidence that women continue to face discrimination when seeking to access maritime education and training. Research published in 2003 found that:

- In some countries, women may find it difficult to enrol on nautical courses and where they do enrol, women have reported that they encounter training staff who are averse to their presence.¹⁷ Professor Helen Sampson believes that some of this could be because colleges have learned that it can be difficult to place women cadets on ships to complete their requisite sea time. This then impacts on the college statistics, because 100% placements are an important part of any maritime college marketing strategy and college success.¹⁸
- Some employers can be reluctant to take on women cadets or qualified female seafarers, partly because of the erroneous belief that women work at sea for less time than men.¹⁹

The 2019 WMU conference highlighted the many ways in which these difficulties still exist and the importance of access to appropriate training and education. Conference delegates passed a set of conclusions stating that the maritime industry should:²⁰

- Promote role models for women in the maritime and ocean communities that can inspire and attract younger generations to sea-related activities, empowering women to acquire skills necessary to achieve leadership positions and break the glass ceiling.
- Motivate women and girls in primary and secondary education to pursue career paths in the maritime and ocean fields, and in particular to raise their awareness in the fields of science, technology and IT-related competencies, engineering, and mathematics.
- Open early-career job opportunities for women and develop attractive career paths for them.
- Organise mentoring, sponsorship and networking programmes that increase the recruitment and retention of women in the maritime and ocean communities.²¹

That conclusions of this kind were passed, is indicative of the fact that there is still considerable resistance among shipping companies to the employment of women.

Better, Faster, Stronger?

The Challenges of Inclusion and Acceptance.

Everyone needs to work in an environment that is conducive to their mental health and wellbeing and most employees want to be productive at work, playing their own part as a team member. Facing hostility at work or enduring subtle forms of exclusion or microaggressions, can be very detrimental to work performance and to the health of the employee in any job role. Evidence shows that women seafarers can be confronted with a certain level of exclusion and sometimes resistance from their male colleagues. This can make it difficult for women seafarers to flourish at work.

¹⁷ International Labour Organisation, Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices (ILO) 3/9/2003 p46

¹⁸ Professor Helen Samson, Seafarers International Research Centre (comments on draft of this report) 26/3/21

¹⁹ International Labour Organisation, Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices (ILO) 3/9/2003 p50/51

²⁰ World Maritime University, Empowering Women in the Maritime Community, Conference Report 24/9/2019 www.wmu.se/scholarly-books/wmu-empowering-women-in-the-maritime-community-conference-report [Accessed 30/9/2019]

*'Such confrontations take a variety of forms, ranging from overt, vociferous hostility, to prejudiced or discriminatory comments in the guise of humour. The intention of such behaviour seems to be to get the message across that the ship is not an appropriate workplace for women'*²²

These kinds of attitudes can become corrosive and undermine confidence, creating a hostile environment, and making life on board very unpleasant for women.

*'It seems that, especially during their first few months on board the vessel, or early in their careers, women encounter a number of men who find it difficult to accept that they can be suitably qualified and willing and capable of carrying out seafaring work. There are indications that this is a particular problem for women engineers working in hot, dirty conditions, regarded as the very antithesis of a feminine environment.'*²³

There is evidence to show that during their first months on board, women seafarers often have to accept higher levels of supervision. Sometimes they are put through tests by their colleagues and superiors to see if they are up to doing the task and if they are made of *'the right stuff for the job'*.²⁴ They often find that they have to work extra hard in an already pressurised environment in order to prove to everyone that they can actually do their job. When men join a ship, they do not have to prove their worth to the other members of the crew. It is already accepted that they are able to do their jobs, but women are immediately held in suspicion.

*'When you do the same thing as they do, after a time it's okay.'*²⁵

In addition to having their abilities questioned, some women report that male colleagues can be overprotective or paternalistic towards them, failing to recognise that women are quite capable of working on board and that they have had the necessary training. *'It is acknowledged that seafarers do not need special strength to do the job at sea nowadays. However, the attitude that exceptional strength is required remains held by a large number of male seafarers.'*²⁶

Research shows that women in senior positions may also experience difficulties with men who seem unable to take orders from women in authority. In other words, it seems as if there is a reluctance on the part of some men to admit that women can be capable of performing to high standards and that women just want to be allowed to get on with their work.

Women tend to overcome these difficulties by outperforming and by proving that they can do their jobs and do them well. Whilst this tactic might help smooth things over and provide assurance to those men who doubt the abilities of their female colleagues, it raises many questions. Why should women have to take on this additional burden of making men feel reassured about women's roles on board ships. Why should women have to go through an additional hoop of having to prove themselves?

In contrast to this, on cruise ships women seafarers in the hotel and catering sector of the cruise industry appear to be more readily accepted by their male colleagues. This is probably due to the fact that the work they are doing conforms to jobs that are traditionally considered to be women's work.²⁷

Sexual Harassment and Intimidation

Sexual harassment and intimidation are a major concern and one that needs firm action from all sectors of the maritime industry. It goes without saying that all vessels should be safe places for women to work. Sexual harassment or intimidation can take place in all kinds of ways, ranging from what might be perceived as harmless banter or inappropriate remarks, to threats, physical violence, and rape. Any kind of sexual harassment is unacceptable.

Women cope with sexual harassment in a number of different ways. Often, on board vessels they may withdraw from social situations, perhaps choosing to avoid going to parties and general on-board social events, or if they do attend, they may choose to leave such occasions early. Some women result to locking themselves in their cabins for security at night and others may take drastic means to avoid being harassed, by altering and defeminising their appearance.²⁸

All shipping companies and agencies need to find effective ways to address sexual harassment. One way forward is for shipping companies and agencies to have robust anti-harassment policies and to be supportive when incidents are brought to their attention. Refraining from harassment and bullying, and the need to observe respect and dignity towards colleagues, can actually be written into employment contracts for seafarers. Research shows that some shipping companies have anti-harassment policies, and this emphasises that sexual harassment is unacceptable. Such policies appear to be most effective where efforts have been made to provide company training and courses about this.

²² International Labour Organisation, Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices (ILO) 3/9/2003 p48

²³ International Labour Organisation, Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices (ILO) 3/9/2003 p48

²⁴ International Labour Organisation, Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices (ILO) 3/9/2003 p49

²⁵ International Labour Organisation, Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices (ILO) 3/9/2003 p49

²⁶ Kitada, M. Women Seafarers and their Identities. PhD Thesis, Cardiff University <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/54387/> p.77 [Accessed 1/9/2019]

²⁷ International Labour Organisation, Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices (ILO) 3/9/2003 p50

²⁸ International Labour Organisation, Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices (ILO) 3/9/2003 p53-57

Where anti-harassment policies are in place, women seafarers tend to be very positive about them, recognising that such policies set standards for the workplace, reduce incidences of sexual harassment, and create a more comfortable and safer working environment. Anti-harassment policies need to be given high priority by shipping companies and agencies and should be actively disseminated amongst employees. Employees also need to be confident that their complaints, where made, will be taken seriously.

Unfortunately, occupational hierarchies can have the effect of deterring women from reporting sexual harassment. Women may be very conscious of the impact their senior officers can have on their shipboard lives and indeed on their entire seafaring careers. It is in such environments that junior personnel in any organisation are most vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation.²⁹ As the #metoo movement shows us, this powerlessness is experienced by women in other workplaces and not just in the maritime industry. The situation for women seafarers is particularly difficult because they can't easily leave their ships once they are at sea.

Formal complaints about sexual harassment are mostly made by women when they believe in the commitment of their employers to eliminate sexual harassment and/or where they have a witness who is willing to support their testimony. In the cruise ship sector, women in lower ranks and from developing countries feel very wary of making complaints about sexual harassment for fear it would lead to them losing their jobs.³⁰

*'I am alone in the world of men so anything can happen out at sea where I cannot shout for help.'*³¹

When complaints about sexual harassment are addressed effectively, women appear to be more confident of both their right to complain and the likelihood that the complaint will be taken seriously.

Access to Good Healthcare on Board

Access to good healthcare on board can be a challenging issue for all seafarers irrespective of their gender or the kind of vessel that they are working on, but there are particular health challenges for women. *The Women Seafarers Health and Welfare Survey* highlights this crucial issue.³² When on board their vessels, some seafarers are largely dependent on fellow crew members for medical consultations and

treatment. Medical care on cargo vessels is generally provided by deck officers, who are responsible for providing advice and on-board medical treatment. This generally works well, but there are occasions when giving or receiving medical care can result in awkward situations for women.

The experience of women seafarers on cruise ships is different because cruise ships have qualified medical personnel on board. However, it is to be noted that on some cruise vessels crew members may have limited access to the ship's medical staff because their working hours may conflict with the availability of the medical staff. Seafarers also need to take permission from supervisors before accessing medical care. The issue of confidentiality may act as a barrier to healthcare on board because some seafarers may avoid seeking care for sensitive health issues such as STDs.³³

The Women Seafarers Health and Welfare Survey provides a number of recommendations to address these issues. Women working on cruise ships who were surveyed, felt that their health would improve if they could have at least a full day off to rest, for example at least one day per month. Privacy on board was also highlighted as a key health issue. Other women highlighted that access to physical activity such as Zumba, or yoga, would improve their health, as would relaxation such as being able to watch films. On cargo ships some women reported that they had limited access to gyms on board because they felt uncomfortable exercising in front of their male colleagues. Other initiatives that have been identified as important for women's health include access to support groups for women where they can reach out for help to someone who can relate to their experiences on board. It was also felt that access to spiritual care could help relieve stress.

Are there any ways in which we can extend spiritual support to women seafarers working on cruise ships?

In the survey, participants were asked to select their top three health challenges. 47% identified joints and back pain, while stress/depression/anxiety were selected by 43%. Joints/back pain was less commonly identified by those working on cargo ships or tankers than in those working on cruise ships. However, stress/depression/anxiety is the top health challenge in both cruise and cargo sectors.³⁴

²⁹ International Labour Organisation, *Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices* (ILO) 3/9/2003 p54

³⁰ International Labour Organisation, *Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices* (ILO) 3/9/2003 p53-57

³¹ International Labour Organisation, *Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices* (ILO) /9/2003 p55

³² *The Women Seafarers Health and Welfare Survey* Sept 2015 www.seafarerswelfare.org/our-work/women-seafarers-health-and-welfare-survey [Accessed15/2/21]

³³ *The Women Seafarers Health and Welfare Survey* Sept 2015 www.seafarerswelfare.org/our-work/women-seafarers-health-and-welfare-survey [Accessed15/2/21] p60

Women also felt that there should be more gender specific information on health issues such as back pain, mental health, gynaecological complaints, and nutrition.³⁵ Another key health challenge for women seafarers is the access to sanitary products and for those on cargo ships in particular, the disposal of sanitary waste. This survey actually highlighted that seafarer centres in particular could help with this by stocking female products in their welfare centres worldwide or providing female products in their mobile shops/shopping services.

Are there any practical ways in which The Mission to Seafarers can promote the health and well-being of women working at sea?

The Use of Space and Time on Board.³⁶

Life on board ships of all kinds is highly regulated and physical space is at a premium. A crew becomes a small community regulated by routines and schedules which allow little flexibility or individual freedom. These kinds of regulations can restrict access to recreational areas on the ship. This may be further complicated by the way in which space on the ship is used. Apart from the division of shipboard spaces and the use of facilities by rank, women may be informally excluded or may not feel comfortable in certain areas of the ship where for example, pornography is watched or openly displayed.

In her research, Dr Momoko Kitada of the World Maritime University, highlights how the masculine culture on board ships extends to shipboard activities which may also reflect masculine interests. *'Shared TV sets are generally dedicated to TV programmes targeted for male audiences on, for example, sports or cars in ship common rooms. Watching pornographic films is also commonplace and generally speaking, women seafarers do not join such activities.'*³⁷

In response to this, women seafarers may spend excessive amounts of time in their cabins pursuing solitary activities.³⁸ This kind of isolation may also extend to shore leave because male colleagues may not necessarily include female colleagues to join them when they are taking shore leave and female colleagues might not wish to join them in any case.³⁹

Family V. Career?

All women seafarers experience the major challenge of balancing family and career. Shipping companies can help address this by having clear policies on maternity leave and by allowing all seafarers to have shorter contracts. There is always an assumption that a woman's absence from the family is more severe than a man's absence, but this is not necessarily true. The negative effect on family life can be just as bad if a man is absent from his family. This is an area which is a challenge for both male and female seafarers across all maritime sectors. Shipping companies can make improvements to terms and conditions for all seafarers and use shorter contracts for seafarers, or at least offer them. This could benefit the families of seafarers whether they are male or female.

Women seafarers find it very difficult to continue with their careers after childbirth. They may face the societal expectation and pressure that they are responsible for childcare and with this the pressure to quit seafaring. More should be done to improve the options available to women so that they can continue with their seagoing careers should they wish to, and shorter contracts may provide a solution. Shorter contracts might be complicated for the shipping agents and companies to arrange but such contracts would certainly enhance the quality of life for all seafarers, allowing them to balance both family life and working life.

Fr Herbert Fadriquela, Chaplain to the port of Felixstowe, tells a story about a female cook that he met on a ship:

*She misses her family back home. While away from them she treats the crew like her family and cares for them as if they were her children. In a way she has become their mother. She finds some sense of solace in this, but she really wants to be a mother to her three teenaged children back in the Philippines. Her husband has a disability and can no longer go to sea and so she has no choice, she has to work to support her family.'*⁴⁰

³⁴ The Women Seafarers Health and Welfare Survey Sept 2015 www.seafarerswelfare.org/our-work/women-seafarers-health-and-welfare-survey [Accessed 15/2/21] p 4

³⁵ The Women Seafarers Health and Welfare Survey Sept 2015 www.seafarerswelfare.org/our-work/women-seafarers-health-and-welfare-survey [Accessed 15/2/21] p16

³⁶ Kitada, M. Women Seafarers and their Identities. PhD Thesis, Cardiff University <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/54387/> Pages 24,73,75,81 [Accessed 1/9/19]

³⁷ Kitada, M. Women Seafarers and their Identities. PhD Thesis, Cardiff University <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/54387/> [Accessed 1/9/19]

³⁸ Kitada, International Labour Organisation, Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices (ILO) 3/9/2003 p54

³⁹ International Labour Organisation, Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices (ILO) 3/9/2003 p53

⁴⁰ Written statement from Revd Canon Herbert Fadriquela, Port Chaplain Humber Ports, UK



3 — Challenges and Barriers in Specific Vessel Types

There are a number of challenges that women encounter which are specific to the type of vessel they sail on. This does not mean that the issues won't be experienced elsewhere, it simply means that the difficulties are more prevalent on specific kinds of vessels. This part of the report highlights the specific challenges that women may encounter on cargo ships, cruise ships and on superyachts.

Cargo Ships⁴¹

As has been highlighted above, crew on cargo ships are still predominantly male and very often women seafarers working on such vessels will hide feminine aspects of themselves in order to fit in. They may not wear perfume or makeup on board, nor wear obviously feminine clothing or dress up their hair. In previous paragraphs the report highlights that there are key issues around the use of space on ships and how women may find that their access to such space is limited. For example, women seafarers may be uncomfortable using gym equipment at the same time as male colleagues and they may not use shared spaces such as mess rooms if pornography is openly displayed. Sanitary waste disposal is a major issue for women seafarers on cargo ships, as is access to sanitary products.

Some male seafarers assume that having women on board is bad luck. In previous paragraphs, the report highlights the assumption that women are poor performers, or physically weak and unable to do certain tasks. Women may find that they are the only woman on board, and this can be isolating, but where there is another woman on board there may be an assumption that the women may wish to spend all their time together and this may not be the case. These challenges are rather peculiar because they seem like small problems to an outsider, but when a person is constantly encountering them and having to negotiate these issues it can become mentally exhausting.

Cruise Ships

There is evidence of a very high degree of sexual activity between seafarers on board cruise ships, with a high degree of partner change.⁴² This brings a risk of poor sexual health especially where such activity is coercive or as a result of pressure. Some women report that they engage in these on-board relationships as a way of protecting themselves from sexual harassment. It might also be that sexual intimacy on

board provides a way of dealing with loneliness and stress, but research shows that the sexual activity on cruise ships is not always safe or protected. There are also implications for partners back home because unprotected sex means that the partner back home is not protected either.

All seafarers working on cruise ships should be given advice and support about engaging in relationships on board. No one should be coerced into sexual relationships and where a choice is freely made people should be given access to condoms or other ways of sustaining their sexual health.

In contrast to the cruise ship sector, in the cargo sector women rarely acknowledged engaging in any kind of sexual relationship or activity on board, and so free access to contraception does not appear to be an issue of concern to them however, this does not mean that the sexual health of seafarers on cargo ships should be ignored. More in-depth research may contradict this assumption.

Superyachts

Superyachts also have aspects of liminality and a very real gap between life on board and life on shore. Women seafarers working on superyachts face similar challenges to their female colleagues working on other kinds of ships. They also face challenges that are specific to this sector, and which are well documented.⁴³ The ISWAN report on superyachts provides insight into the challenges of welfare for superyacht crews. The report highlights that working on superyachts provides exciting opportunities for both male and female seafarers but there is the challenge of long hours and the impact of this on both physical and mental health. There is also a strong drinking culture within this sector, as well as the taking of illegal drugs.

The ISWAN report highlights that accessing support for mental healthcare is a major issue for people working on superyachts especially for women:

⁴¹ Kitada, M. Women Seafarers and their Identities. PhD Thesis, Cardiff University orca.cf.ac.uk/54387/ [Accessed 1/9/19]

⁴² Thomas, Bloor, Little, Sexual Risk Among Female Workers on Cruise Ships, *WMU J Marit. Affairs* (2013) 12:87–9 link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs13437-013-0037-6.pdf [Accessed 15/2/21]

⁴³ The Welfare of Superyacht Crew, ISWAN Dec 2018 www.seafarerswelfare.org/our-work/superyacht-crew-welfare [Accessed 15/2/2021]

- 80% of the female respondents reported that they have suffered from one or more episodes of work-related stress.
- 75% of the people surveyed feeling that the industry was not doing enough to promote mental health.
- 48% of those responding had their spiritual and religious needs that were not being met.

The long hours, the lack of sleep, the lack of downtime or time for exercise, the lack of privacy and the confined space and a macho culture, all contribute to high stress levels for both for male and female seafarers working in this sector. There is a gender pay gap for women working in the deck and engineering departments, and women might find that they are receiving lower pay and doing more boring jobs in comparison to male colleagues.

One challenge in the Superyacht sector that differs from the other sectors, is the pressure on how both women, and men are expected to look. Within this sector there is an expectation that the female seafarers need to be slim and presentable which is in total contrast to the cargo sector where women try to downplay their femininity.

Women working in this sector report that there is sexism, racism, and age discrimination. Unfortunately, harassment is also an issue in this sector with 53% of women saying that they had experienced discrimination, harassment or bullying from the owner, or other crew, or the guests.

Women seafarers in this sector face the same challenges as the other sectors when it comes to sexual harassment. Women experience sexual harassment from owners and captains and even guests. This harassment may be covered up and made to look like playful banter. There is little support for women seafarers when sexual harassment occurs in the superyacht sector.





4 —

**A better future is
possible**

Empowering Women in the Maritime Community Conference⁴⁴

The aim of this inspirational conference was to address the gender gap in maritime, ports, fishing, and related industries. The conference, which was excellent, produced a set of conclusions that were developed to serve as best practice guidance for those stakeholders who are committed to working for gender parity across maritime and ocean industries. It is hoped that these recommendations and conclusions will help increase the numbers of women in the maritime and ocean sector professions. These can be found in the appendix.



Peer Support for Women seafarers

There are a number of maritime organisations and associations that aim to provide women with peer support from other women. These organisations such as WISTA⁴⁵ and Women Offshore⁴⁶ provide women with a vibrant physical and on-line spaces where they can share experiences as well as seek solutions to common challenges. They are also excellent professional networks that can help in career development and progression. Regular conferences, and regional and local meetings as well as online networks and groups, provide opportunities for women to meet and form professional friendships.

Our Mission, Our Response?

The key question for all maritime welfare organisations is how can we respond to the challenges outlined above and contribute to a better future for women seafarers?

What can we do within our specific organisations, centres, ports and stations to support women working in all maritime sectors and on all kinds of vessels?

For many years, the care that we have provided has been largely focused on a male -dominated industry and male needs, but the growing popularity of the cruise ship industry and the growth of the superyacht industry show us that we should do more. Efforts are now being made to extend the welfare we provide to seafarers working on cruise ships and those working on super yachts. Maritime welfare agencies all over the world continue to provide much needed care to the cargo sector but how can we ensure that we are responding to the growing number of women involved in the maritime industry? Is there more that we can do to enhance the global push to encourage women to develop their careers in the maritime sector and is there more than we can do to support the women who decide to develop careers in this sector?

With our network of chaplains and volunteers we are well placed to think about how to respond to the needs of women seafarers and to develop our own initiatives so that any female seafarer entering our ports is given the tailored kind of care that she needs. This will be a way of recognising the changes that are taking place within the shipping industry and mobilising ourselves to respond to them with clear focus and targeted initiatives.

⁴⁴ World Maritime University, Empowering Women in the Maritime Community, Conference Report 24/9/2019 www.wmu.se/scholarly-books/wmu-empowering-women-in-the-maritime-community-conference-report [Accessed 30/9/2019]

⁴⁵ WISTA wistainternational.com/

⁴⁶ womenoffshore.org/

Additional questions for discussion

How can the Mission to Seafarers better support female seafarers?

Do we as a maritime welfare organisation truly understand what life at sea is like for women and what steps can we take to improve our understanding?

What are the needs of women seafarers that we can identify and what can we do to meet those needs?

How can our various services and spiritual care that we provide support the economic and social development of women seafarers?

Does the international push for gender equality have any implications for the ways in which we work and minister?

Bibliography and further reading

Books _____

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International Human Rights Law

Rhona K.M. Smith, Oxford University Press, 2020

International Seafarers and Transnationalism in the Twenty-First Century

Helen Sampson, Manchester University Press, 2013

Women seafarers: Global Leadership

Momoko Kitada, Erin Williams, Lisa Loloma Froholdt Editor
World Maritime University and Springer, 2015

Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices

Phillip Belcher, Helen Sampson, Michelle Thomas, Jaime Veiga and Minghua Zhao
International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 2013

Electronic Resources and Articles _____

Third WMU International Women's Conference: Empowering Women in the Maritime Community

World Maritime University
www.commonswmu.se/lib_reports/62/

International Maritime Organisation

www.imo.org/en/OurWork/TechnicalCooperation/Pages/WomenInMaritime.aspx

Introduction to Global Gender Inequality

SDG Academy X: HR001 Human Rights, Human Wrongs: Challenging Poverty, Vulnerability and Social Exclusion

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Sexual Risk Among Female Workers on Cruise Ships

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The Bottom Line; Corporate Performance and Women's Representation on Boards

www.catalyst.org/research/the-bottom-line-corporate-performance-and-womens-representation-on-boards/

The Welfare of Superyacht Crew

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The Women Seafarers Health and Welfare Survey

ISWAN, 2015

www.seafarerswelfare.org/our-work/women-seafarers-health-and-welfare-survey

UN Women

www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures

www.unwomen.org/en

Why the Maritime Industry Needs More Women

Magda Ibrahim October 17, 2018

www.raconteur.net/hr/diversity-inclusion/maritime-jobs-women/

Women Seafarers and their Identities

Kitada, M.

PhD Thesis, Cardiff University <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/54387/>

Women's Associations and Online Resources

WISTA

wistainternational.com/

Women Offshore

womenoffshore.org/

Safer Waves

saferwaves.org/

Appendix

Third International Women’s Conference World Maritime University (WMU), 5 April 2019 Malmö, Sweden⁴⁷

Recalled that the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were adopted by more than 150 world leaders during the UN Sustainable Development Summit from September 25-27 at UN headquarters in New York, and in September 2015 at a historic UN Summit;

Welcomed the decision by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) that “Empowering Women in the Maritime Community” would be the theme for World Maritime Day 2019, in line with the SDGs, in particular Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls;

Acknowledged IMO’s efforts in achieving SDG Goal 5 as indicated in Resolutions adopted by the IMO on the “Promotion of the participation of women in the maritime industry” adopted in 1998 and 2010; the “Busan Declaration” adopted during the IMO Regional Conference on the Development of a Global Strategy for Women Seafarers in 2013; and the capacity-building programme, previously known as the Integration of Women in the Maritime Sector (IWMS);

Took into account the steps taken by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to ensure the equal opportunity principle and prohibit gender discrimination, as required in the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111);

Recommended that all Member states ratify and implement the ILO Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, with a view to achieving the 100 ratification target by end of 2019 in celebration of ILO’s

100th anniversary, as well as the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188); Welcomed the efforts to promote the effective implementation of an inclusive work environment on board ships, as well as initiatives such as the ILO Sectoral Meeting on the Recruitment and Retention of Seafarers and the Promotion of Opportunities for Women Seafarers, held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 25 February to 1 March 2019;

Built upon previous initiatives taken by WMU to host a First International Conference on the Empowerment of Professional Women in the Maritime World in 2008, and a second International Conference on Maritime Women: Global Leadership in 2014; and

Appreciated warmly the generosity of all donors to and sponsors of the Third WMU International Conference on Empowering Women in the Maritime Community.

The Participants of the Conference committed in their respective sectors and areas of responsibility to cooperate, coordinate and collaborate in the development and implementation of gender responsive policies, measures and related programmes.

The Participants urged international organizations, governmental entities and stakeholders in the maritime and ocean communities, including those in shipping, ports, fishing, seafood harvesting, marine and energy research and other sea-related activities to:

⁴⁷ www.wmu.se/sites/default/files/documents/files/Final%20conclusion_3rd%20WMU%20women%27s%20conference.pdf

- Develop, adopt and enforce gender-responsive policies and related programmes while ensuring that the policy development process is consultative, participatory and includes all relevant international organizations, governmental entities, industry and other non-governmental stakeholders;
 - Improve the visibility of women professionals in all sea-related sectors by mapping out the number and positions they occupy and take measurable actions that can contribute to progress;
 - Promote role models for women in the maritime and ocean communities that can inspire and attract younger generations to sea-related activities, empowering women to acquire skills necessary to achieve leadership positions and break the glass ceiling;
 - Motivate women and girls in primary and secondary education to pursue career paths in the maritime and ocean fields, and in particular to raise their awareness in the fields of science, technology and IT-related competencies, engineering and mathematics;
 - Open early-career job opportunities for women and develop attractive career paths for them;
 - Organize mentoring, sponsorship and networking programmes that increase recruitment and retention of women in the maritime and ocean communities
 - Mainstream gender in the maritime and ocean professions to enhance respect for diversity and achieve a work environment free from violence, discrimination and harassment;
 - Give priority to funding gender research on maritime and ocean fields, particularly in occupational health and safety matters;
 - Raise awareness of the significant economic contribution of women in all sea-related activities, including the special needs and role of indigenous communities;
 - Provide gender-sensitive working and living conditions on board ships;
 - Implement conciliation measures to make work time compatible with private and family life for all workers regardless of gender;
 - Ensure equal employment opportunities, including equal pay for women in the maritime and ocean communities.
- Introduce gender equality as a business case for initiating commercial partnerships;
 - Develop and implement corporate policies and best practices on the employment of women;
 - Implement a plan to enhance diversity and equality at all levels;
 - Ensure a consultative approach in global development taking into account those communities that are dependent on the oceans for their survival; and
 - Include women in all decision-making relating to policies and regulations.

Six critical actions that should be given priority are highlighted below:

1. A new study should be undertaken without delay that would provide the most up to date information and data on the number of women in maritime and oceans fields across all sectors and the positions they occupy.
2. Affirmative action in capacity building should be taken to support Gender Empowerment for the Decade of Ocean Science.
3. A network platform should be established to address gender empowerment, learning and sharing best practice in a knowledge hub and build support.
4. A solid engagement of all stakeholders should be put in place in consultation with women and minorities.
5. Education and training initiatives and partnerships should be pursued that promote gender rights and equality in the maritime and ocean communities.
6. Enhanced collaborative opportunities to work together should be actively pursued to support the effective implementation of UN SDG Goal 5 (Gender) and Goal 14 (Oceans).

If you would like to discuss the contents of this report,
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