TIDES OF DISCRIMINATION: UNPACKING GENDER INEQUALITY IN GHANA'S SEAFARING CULTURE AND INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: In recent years, a significant shift has been observed with an increasing number of women joining the ranks of seafarers in the maritime industry. Despite this progression, women in seafaring continue to encounter challenges that impede their career advancement. A comprehensive survey revealed that gender-based discrimination, onboard harassment, and bullying against women remain prevalent in the maritime industry. This paper seeks to explore the challenges faced by women seafarers in Ghana's maritime industry.

Design/methodology/approach: The research employed a qualitative research approach, adopting a case study design, which is suitable for providing comprehensive insights into complex social phenomena and allows for an in-depth understanding of the unique challenges encountered by the participants. Twenty participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The study employed interview as the research instrument. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data as it provides a systematic approach to coding and interpreting, facilitating a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Findings: The study found that some factors that contribute to challenges women seafarers face include: the male-dominated culture of the industry, gender-based discrimination and harassment, the lack of adequate facilities and resources for women onboard. These challenges significantly impact the career progression and job satisfaction of these women seafarers. Gender bias and discrimination hinder opportunities for advancement, skill development, and promotions, leading to feelings of frustration and decreased morale among female seafarers

Originality: Despite the progression of women in seafaring, they continue to encounter multifaceted challenges that impede their advancement and full participation in this domain. Existing research predominantly focuses on challenges faced by women seafarers in developed maritime economies leaving a dearth of empirical studies addressing the challenges of women seafarers in developing maritime nations like Ghana.

Keywords: Challenges, Maritime, Seafarers, Training, Women

1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Galani (2022), while the industrial revolution introduced mechanization in maritime industries, it further marginalized women. Men predominantly occupied roles in shipyards and factories, whereas women were relegated to ancillary positions such as

seamstresses, laundresses, or dockside workers. However, the two World Wars temporarily opened avenues for women to enter the maritime workforce, filling positions left vacant by enlisted men. Post-war, women's involvement in the maritime sector gradually increased, with female sailors and officers beginning to appear in traditionally male-dominated areas like merchant shipping, albeit facing discrimination and limited career advancement opportunities. The increase in women's presence in maritime roles after World War II stemmed from shifts in social and economic dynamics. With many men serving in wartime duties, industries like maritime faced a labor shortage, creating openings for women in sectors from which they had previously been excluded. Despite this progress, integrating women into maritime roles posed significant challenges. Discriminatory attitudes and entrenched gender biases hindered women's entry and advancement in the industry (Galani, 2022). Harper et al., (2017) argued that many maritime institutions and employers implemented biased policies and practices that excluded and marginalized women. Some companies had rules prohibiting women from working aboard ships. For example, British East India Company during the colonial era prohibited women from working aboard ships. Also, the White Star Line, the company that operated the Titanic, did not employ women as crew members on their ships until the early 20th century. These policies were reflective of broader societal norms and gender discrimination prevalent during those times. Pineiro and Kitada (2020) add that safety and security of women at sea were also often cited as reasons for their exclusion from maritime professions. Sallis in his study in 2022 stated that many shipping companies and maritime institutions held onto outdated beliefs about women's capabilities and suitability for seafaring roles, leading to resistance in hiring and promoting female personnel.

Women in the maritime sector encountered systemic barriers impeding their career progression. Limited access to training and educational opportunities, along with a lack of mentorship and support networks, hampered their advancement (Galani, 2022). Legal restrictions, social biases, and institutional barriers also limited women's participation in seafaring professions (Wu et al., 2017). The absence of gender-sensitive policies within shipping companies often resulted in women being overlooked for promotions and leadership roles, perpetuating the gender gap in maritime employment. Advocacy and awareness campaigns are essential for challenging gender stereotypes, promoting cultural change, and garnering support for gender equality initiatives in the maritime sector. Research by Roberts and Johnson (2017) underscores the significance of raising awareness about the contributions of women seafarers, highlighting their achievements, and advocating for policies that address gender-based discrimination and inequality. Such campaigns can foster a more inclusive and supportive maritime community. Additionally, cultural norms and attitudes prevalent within the maritime industry or specific regions pose significant barriers to the effective implementation of policies supporting women seafarers.

Women are taking more roles in the maritime industry particularly seafaring. Despite this progression, women in seafaring continue to encounter multifaceted challenges that impede their advancement and full participation in this domain. Existing research predominantly focuses on challenges faced by women seafarers in developed maritime economies (Narayanan et al., 2023; Pike et al., 2021; Pineiro & Kitada, 2020) leaving a dearth of empirical studies addressing the challenges of women seafarers in developing maritime nations like Ghana. Consequently, there is the need to conduct a case study to explore the distinct challenges

encountered by women seafarers in Ghana and the available support systems put in place to address these challenges.

2.0 EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

Historically, seafaring has long been perceived as a traditionally male-dominated profession (Pike et al., 2021). This perception stems from various cultural, social, and historical factors. In the past few decades, maritime roles such as sailing, fishing, and navigating were primarily filled by men due to prevailing gender norms and stereotypes (Pike et al., 2021). Throughout history, societies have been patriarchal, with men holding dominant roles in various aspects of life, including professions like seafaring; and this historical context has shaped perceptions and expectations regarding gender roles (Pike et al., 2021). According to Narayanan et al., (2023) traditional seafaring roles were physically demanding and often involved strenuous labor, which was perceived as more suitable for men. This perception was reinforced by the belief that women were physically weaker and less capable of handling the rigors of life at sea (Pike et al., 2021). Kitada (2021) asserts that seafaring and its association with danger, adventure, and rough conditions, was often categorized as a masculine pursuit.

According to Silvero (2023), despite significant efforts on both local and international fronts to promote gender awareness in the maritime industry, a comprehensive survey conducted jointly by the Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA), the International Seafarers Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), and the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) has revealed that gender-based discrimination, onboard harassment, and bullying against women remain prevalent. The survey, which included responses from 1,128 women seafarers from 78 countries, highlighted the persistent issues faced by women in the maritime sector. The largest group of respondents came from the Philippines (399), followed by the United States (98), the United Kingdom (57), South Africa (51), Brazil (47), India (41), Peru (36), Colombia (35), and Indonesia (35). Approximately 90 percent of the respondents worked on cruise ships, with the remainder employed on cargo ships, gas and oil tankers, container ships, general cargo vessels, chemical tankers, bulk carriers, and tugs. Among these respondents, 60 percent reported encountering gender-based discrimination onboard, while 66 percent indicated that their male colleagues harassed and intimidated female coworkers. Furthermore, 25 percent of the respondents considered physical and sexual harassment to be common in the shipping industry, often involving intrusions on women seafarers' privacy. Although most respondents shared their personal experiences of gender discrimination, some reported not witnessing such incidents. Nevertheless, 34 percent felt alienated or neglected due to their gender, and 29 percent experienced harassment and bullying at work. Additionally, 13 percent of respondents received rude or lewd texts or videos, and a staggering 70 percent of harassment incidents were attributed to male colleagues. The harassment often included personal questions and other intrusions on privacy. These findings underscore the urgent need for more effective measures to combat gender discrimination and harassment in the maritime industry (Silvero, 2023). In addition, the absence of visible female role models and support networks within maritime industries made it difficult for women to envision themselves succeeding in such careers (McClellan, 2020). The lack of mentorship and professional networks further hindered their advancement. However, in recent years, a significant shift has been observed with an increasing number of women joining the ranks of seafarers (Turgo, 2021).

The theoretical review for this study is grounded in gender studies and feminist theory, which provide a lens to understand the systemic barriers and cultural norms that contribute to gender inequality in male-dominated professions like seafaring. Some theories that underpin this paper are as follows:

2.1 Gender Discrimination and Stereotypes

Gender discrimination and stereotypes are pervasive in many industries, including maritime. These biases stem from entrenched societal norms and stereotypes about gender roles and capabilities (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). In the maritime industry, traditional perceptions of seafaring as a masculine pursuit reinforce these biases, hindering women's entry and advancement (Kitada, 2021).

2.2 Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is a significant challenge for women in seafaring, as the profession often involves long periods away from home. This dynamic creates unique challenges for women, particularly those with family responsibilities (Stone & Lovejoy, 2021). The lack of family-friendly policies and support systems exacerbates these challenges, contributing to lower retention rates among women seafarers.

2.3 Safety and Security Concerns

Safety and security concerns are prevalent among women seafarers, with many reporting experiences of harassment and bullying. These issues are not only personal violations but also professional barriers that impede women's ability to perform their duties effectively (Pineiro & Kitada, 2020). Creating a safe and supportive environment is crucial for retaining women in the maritime industry.

2.4 Mentorship and Networking

Mentorship and networking are critical for career development in male-dominated industries. The absence of visible female role models and support networks makes it difficult for women to envision successful maritime careers (McClellan, 2020). Establishing mentorship programs and professional networks can provide women with the guidance, support, and advocacy needed to advance in their careers (Coble, 2018).

2.5 Advocacy and Policy Implementation

Advocacy and policy implementation are essential for addressing gender inequality in the maritime industry. Effective policies must go beyond mere statements of intent to include concrete measures for enforcement and accountability. Gender-sensitive policies, specialized training programs, and robust reporting mechanisms for harassment and discrimination are necessary to create a more inclusive and equitable workplace (MacNeil & Ghosh, 2017).

The study's theoretical review highlights the complex interplay of gender discrimination, work-life balance, safety concerns, and the lack of mentorship and support networks that contribute to the challenges faced by women seafarers in Ghana. By adopting a multi-faceted

approach that includes policy reforms, training initiatives, supportive environments, networking opportunities, and advocacy efforts, the maritime industry can create a more inclusive and equitable environment for women seafarers.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research aimed to explore the challenges faced by women seafarers in Ghana's maritime industry, employing a qualitative research approach to delve deeply into their experiences and perspectives. The study adopted a case study design, which is suitable for providing comprehensive insights into complex social phenomena and allows for an in-depth understanding of the unique challenges encountered by the participants (Yin, 2018). A qualitative approach was chosen due to its effectiveness in capturing the nuanced and subjective experiences of women seafarers, which quantitative methods might overlook (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Robinson and Miller (2023), qualitative research is particularly suited for studies aiming to understand complex phenomena, as it enables participants to articulate their emotions, experiences, and perspectives in their own words.

Twenty participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling ensured that only women seafarers, who are central to the study's objectives, were included. Snowball sampling was used because the target population was hard to reach, leveraging existing participants' networks to recruit further respondents (Patton, 2015). Additionally, representatives from organized female maritime bodies, such as the Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA) and Women in Maritime Association (WIMA), were interviewed to provide diverse perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method. Interview protocols were developed to guide the conversations, focusing on themes such as gender discrimination, career opportunities, work-life balance, and safety concerns. This method allowed for flexibility in exploring individual experiences while ensuring that core topics were consistently covered across all interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is suitable for qualitative studies as it provides a systematic approach to coding and interpreting qualitative data, facilitating a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Participants

Twenty Ghanaian female seafarers were sampled, while some were met in a face-to-face interview session, others were enlisted via the video conferencing platform such as Zoom. The respondents who were all female had ages ranging from 20 to 45 years (M = 26). The sample included Ghanaians female seafarers who met the criterion of being currently employed or having worked within the previous two years. Participants had varying maritime experience, ranging from 2 to 14years (M = 7). Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided.

4.2 Findings

The study found that women in seafaring encounter several challenges including gender discrimination and stereotypes, limited career opportunities, work-life balance challenges and safety and security concerns. These challenges are influenced by the nature of the maritime industry and societal norms. Again, the maritime industry has historically been male dominated, with deeply entrenched cultural norms and attitudes that can be exclusionary to women. This culture creates a hostile environment, making it difficult for women to integrate and advance in their careers. Also, isolation and limited support networks as it often involves long periods away from home and family, leading to isolation and a lack of support networks for women. This is particularly challenging for those who may be the only woman onboard or in a senior position, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and alienation. Again, the issue of Gender-based discrimination and harassment and the Lack of facilities and resources. Finally, responses from representatives of the organized female bodies in maritime (WISTA and WIMA) seems to align with the responses from respondents and this which shows that the perspectives are common, and the challenges encountered by female seafarers run through.

4.3 The negative impact of these challenges women faces in seafaring

Sixty (60%) of the respondents reported that the challenges faced by women in seafaring affect the maritime industry in these ways:

- It tags the industry as a gateway for female harassment and biasness.
- It tarnishes the name of the industry which makes it difficult for younger females to develop passion for seafaring.
- By limiting diversity, talent and perspectives, it results in a shortage of skilled workers hindering innovation and perpetuates outdated practices.

Supporting women in traditionally male-dominated industries like seafaring involves a multi-faceted approach. The study found these strategies and support systems put in place to address the challenges faced by women seafarers.

Primarily, the adoption of gender-sensitive policies would go a long way to ensure that women are treated fairly. Secondly, seafaring companies should provide specialized training programs and educational initiatives aimed at women interested in pursuing careers in seafaring. This includes scholarships, mentorship programs, and workshops focused on building skills and confidence. Again, creating supportive environment by fostering inclusive and supportive workplace cultures where women feel safe, respected, and valued. This involves promoting zero-tolerance policies for harassment and discrimination and providing channels for reporting and addressing grievances. These policies should clearly state that any form of harassment or discrimination, including but not limited to gender-based issues, will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Such policies set a standard for behavior and make it clear that all employees, regardless of gender, are entitled to a safe and respectful work environment.

Also, Seafaring companies should also establish networks and support groups specifically for women seafarers to connect, share experiences, and provide mutual support. These groups offer a sense of community and solidarity, as well as practical advice and mentorship opportunities. Women in seafaring may find themselves in situations where they are the minority onboard ships or within port facilities. Having a network of other women in similar roles provides a

sense of community and solidarity. It helps combat feelings of isolation and fosters a sense of belonging.

Finally, Advocacy and awareness-raising by engaging with stakeholders such as employers, policymakers, and industry associations to promote systemic change. By establishing networks and support groups, seafaring companies raise awareness about the importance of gender diversity and inclusion in the maritime industry. They advocate for policies and practices that promote equal opportunities for women and address issues such as gender-based discrimination and harassment.

Overall, these networks and support groups play a vital role in creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in maritime professions. By fostering connections, sharing experiences, providing practical advice, offering mentorship opportunities, and advocating for change, they contribute to the advancement and empowerment of women in the maritime industry.

It is worth knowing that some organizations have established policies to address the challenges faced by women seafarers, however, the extent of effectiveness of some of these policies. Majority (60%) of the respondents reported that the policies put in place to address the challenges faced by women seafarers in ineffective. Reasons why policies aimed at addressing the challenges of women seafarers are not effective are: lack of implementation, gender bias and cultural barriers. While policies exist on paper, they often fail to be effectively implemented due to various reasons such as lack of awareness, resources, or commitment from relevant authorities. Without proper enforcement, policies remain ineffective in addressing the challenges faced by women seafarers. Again, deep-rooted gender biases within the maritime industry hinder the effectiveness of policies. These biases manifest in discriminatory practices, unequal opportunities for women, or insufficient support systems. Such biases undermine the intended impact of policies designed to support women seafarers. In addition, cultural norms and attitudes prevalent within the maritime industry or specific regions pose significant barriers to the effective implementation of policies supporting women seafarers. These cultural barriers include stereotypes about women's capabilities at sea, resistance to change traditional gender roles, or societal expectations that discourage women from pursuing careers in seafaring.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Challenges Faced by Women in Seafaring

The findings align with existing literature on the challenges faced by women in seafaring, corroborating a longstanding narrative of gender disparities within the maritime industry. Traylor et al. (2020) indicate that pervasive gender discrimination and stereotypes hinder women's advancement, reflecting broader societal biases. This aligns with the theoretical review on gender discrimination, which highlights how entrenched stereotypes and biases manifest in organizational practices and decision-making processes, ultimately limiting women's career opportunities (Glass & Cook, 2016; Salin, 2021). Limited career opportunities for women in seafaring echo findings across various male-dominated fields, highlighting systemic barriers to women's progression (Kim et al., 2019). Work-life balance challenges resonate with studies on women in high-demand professions, underscoring the need for family-friendly policies to support women's retention and well-being (Stone & Lovejoy, 2021). This

connection to the theoretical review on work-life balance emphasizes how the lack of supportive policies can lead to higher turnover rates and decreased job satisfaction.

Safety and security concerns faced by women at sea mirror documented instances of gender-based violence in male-dominated environments, underscoring the urgency for robust protocols and support systems (Gupta et al., 2023). This ties into the theoretical discussion on safety and security, highlighting the need for zero-tolerance policies for harassment and discrimination to ensure women's safety and well-being in the workplace. The accounts from women in seafaring echo broader discussions on gender bias and discrimination in the workplace. Studies across industries have documented instances where women are overlooked for promotions (Glass & Cook, 2016), denied opportunities for skill development (Galea et al., 2020), and face unequal treatment compared to their male counterparts (Salin, 2021). This bias often stems from entrenched societal norms and stereotypes about gender roles and capabilities, which manifest in organizational practices and decision-making processes (Gupta et al., 2023).

Additionally, the emotional toll of facing gender bias and discrimination on job satisfaction and turnover rates is well-documented in the literature. When women are consistently overlooked or undervalued in the workplace, it can lead to feelings of frustration, demotivation, and decreased job satisfaction. Ultimately, this contributes to higher turnover rates as talented individuals seek environments where their contributions are recognized and valued. The challenges faced by women in seafaring underscore broader issues of gender bias and discrimination prevalent in male-dominated industries. Addressing these challenges requires proactive efforts from organizations to recognize and mitigate biases, promote diversity and inclusion, and create environments where all employees have equal opportunities for career advancement and job satisfaction.

5.2 Strategies Adopted to Address the Challenges Facing Women in Seafaring

Concerning the strategies adopted to address the challenges facing women in seafaring, numerous studies emphasize the importance of implementing gender-sensitive policies to promote equality and inclusivity in the workplace (MacNeil & Ghosh, 2017). Gender-sensitive policies are essential for addressing systemic barriers that hinder women's participation and advancement in male-dominated industries like seafaring (MacNeil & Ghosh, 2017). By ensuring equal recruitment opportunities, promotion criteria, and workplace regulations, companies can create environments where women feel valued and respected, contributing to improved retention rates and career satisfaction among female seafarers (MacNeil & Ghosh, 2017). This approach ties into the theoretical review on advocacy and policy implementation, emphasizing the necessity for systemic changes to promote gender equality.

Scholarships, mentorship programs, and workshops targeting women interested in maritime careers are recognized as effective strategies for increasing gender diversity in the industry. Studies highlight the need for comprehensive training that addresses both technical skills and soft skills, such as leadership and communication, to empower women to succeed in seafaring roles (de Água et al., 2020). This supports the theoretical review on mentorship and networking, which underscores the importance of mentorship programs and professional networks in fostering career advancement and skill development for women in male-dominated fields. Research consistently emphasizes the importance of fostering inclusive and supportive

workplace cultures to attract and retain women in male-dominated fields (de Água et al., 2020). Zero-tolerance policies for harassment and discrimination, coupled with robust reporting mechanisms and support services, are essential for ensuring women's safety and well-being at sea. Training programs aimed at promoting diversity, inclusion, and respectful behavior further contribute to creating a positive work environment where women feel valued and supported.

5.3 Relevance of Networks and Support Groups in Facilitating Peer Support

The literature recognizes the value of networks and support groups in facilitating peer support, mentorship, and knowledge-sharing among women in underrepresented industries (Chaudhuri et al., 2021). By connecting women seafarers with one another, these groups help combat feelings of isolation and provide a platform for addressing common challenges related to gender discrimination, safety concerns, and career development. Research suggests that strong support networks can enhance women's resilience and confidence in navigating male-dominated work environments (Chaudhuri et al., 2021). Mentorship programs are widely regarded as effective tools for promoting career advancement and professional growth among women in traditionally male-dominated sectors. Studies highlight the importance of pairing women with experienced mentors who can offer guidance, advice, and advocacy within the industry (Coble, 2018). Mentorship relationships help bridge the gender gap by providing women with access to valuable networks, resources, and opportunities for skill development and advancement (Coble, 2018). By engaging with stakeholders and raising awareness about gender equality issues, seafaring companies can influence industry norms and promote a culture of inclusivity and respect. Research suggests that sustained advocacy efforts are necessary for challenging gender stereotypes, addressing unconscious bias, and promoting equal opportunities for women in maritime professions (Shellock et al., 2022).

These strategies and support systems are implemented globally, although their availability and effectiveness may vary across different regions and countries. International organizations, such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), play integral roles in fostering universal efforts aimed at combating gender disparity as well as enhancing safety within the maritime sector. At the same time, national, regional, and global industry associations, trade unions, and non-governmental organizations are engaged in implementing actions promoting the elimination of discrimination in close relation to the necessary interventions addressing special women-related needs among women working at sea in the twenty-first century. Though we have made certain advancements, continuous partnership and communication between all parties involved remain crucial for these endeavors not only to be consistent but also to accurately tackle global challenges confronting female sailors.

Generally, the findings discussed align closely with existing literature on gender diversity and inclusion in the maritime industry, highlighting the importance of comprehensive strategies and support systems for addressing the unique challenges faced by women seafarers. By adopting a multi-faceted approach that encompasses policy reforms, training initiatives, supportive environments, networking opportunities, mentorship programs, and advocacy efforts, companies can create more inclusive and equitable workplaces where women can thrive and contribute to the industry's success.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The maritime sector has long been entrenched in a culture that favors male representation, perpetuating barriers that hinder women from fully participating and advancing in seafaring careers. Despite progress in recent years, significant challenges persist, ranging from gender discrimination and limited career opportunities to work-life balance issues and safety concerns. The findings underscore the profound impact of these challenges on women's career progression and job satisfaction in the maritime industry. Gender bias not only stifles the professional growth of women seafarers but also deprives organizations of diverse perspectives and talents, ultimately undermining productivity and innovation. The study identified various strategies and support systems that are being adopted and implemented to address the barriers faced by women seafarers. Among these are gender-sensitive policies, specialized training programs, supportive environments, networking opportunities, mentorship initiatives, and advocacy efforts all contribute to fostering a more inclusive and equitable maritime industry. By prioritizing gender equality and promoting diversity and inclusion, seafaring companies can not only attract and retain top talent but also create a more resilient and sustainable workforce. It is imperative for stakeholders across the maritime sector to continue championing these initiatives, driving systemic change and paving the way for a future where women thrive in maritime professions. While challenges persist, concerted efforts to address gender inequality and empower women in seafaring hold the promise of a more prosperous and equitable maritime industry for all.

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