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A Comparative Study of the Perspectives of Men and Women in Maritime on Gender Issue

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Abstract

Maritime is a male dominated sector and women working in this sector experience some hardships because of the special working conditions and the prejudice against them. There is an ongoing ERASMUS Project aiming to help women overcome the hardships they encounter in the sector. In the framework of the project, a survey which consists of 50 questions was prepared and applied to both men and women working in maritime. While evaluating the responses it was seen that with some questions there is an agreement between the responses given by men and women, while there is a big discrepancy in some others. In this study, only the questions with a discrepancy of over 20% in the responses for the same choice (Yes or No) are taken into consideration with an eye to evaluate the perception of various situations by different genders. Almost all of these questions are related to the reactions of men to the behaviours of women on board or how the presence of women on board is perceived by men. Then, what the reasons for these negative reactions may be and what can be done to prevent them are looked into.

1. Introduction

Men and women have been the subject of many studies concerning the gender issue. Some of these studies have found significant differences between them, while some others haven't found anything meaningful. One of the studies focusing on differences between two genders is about stereotypes. Stereotypes are perceptions about the qualities that distinguish groups of categories of people. They are typically thought of as overgeneralizations. They can apply to any category that a society considers important. Gender is one of them. People use stereotypes as cognitive short-cuts in anticipating the motives, abilities and behaviours of others. Stereotypes are further reinforced by various social mechanisms, such as the "**spillover effect**" which suggests that societal gender roles may contaminate organizational roles and result in different expectations for female and male managers. In short, gender belief systems include stereotype and gender-role attitudes [1]. Women are generally stereotyped based on familiar women's roles such as a wife or nurse and the characteristics they embody, which are currently inconsistent with those that traditionally define a good business leader [2].

Other than the limitations brought by stereotyping effects causing women to fall behind, there are some other factors which have a negative role in their chances of excelling in workplaces. A study conducted on female mariners and male nurses found that, as members of visible minority groups, they stand out at work and receive far more than their fair share of attention. For example, women in corporations, simply by virtue of their numerical rarity were noticed and scrutinized more than their male counterparts. The fact that "numerically rare" men and women stand out this way can put added pressure on them in their jobs. This added pressure may result in different job performances from men and women in nontraditional occupations and exacerbate gender differences. Women, for example, become more secretive, less independent and less oppositional in response to their greater visibility, all traits that have traditionally been associated with femininity [3].

Another factor that enhances gender differences is practiced by supervisors who evaluate men and women differently. The very qualities that are highly praised in one sex are sometimes denigrated in the other. Thus a man is ambitious, a woman is pushy; a woman is sensitive, a man wimpy. Two

groups who occasionally encounter such biased gender stereotypes from the people they work with are female mariners and male nurses. People's unfavorable beliefs and attitudes concerning women lower their evaluations of women's behaviour and performances [4].

Intolerance is another factor contributing to the bias against women. The following excerpt is taken from the book "Gender Differences at Work: Women and Men in Non-traditional Occupations" told by a thirty-six-year old master sergeant with sixteen and half years experience about being a woman in the Marine Corps: *You are always on Show. Take myself and a male counterpart – same rank, same MOS (military occupational speciality), and we are going into the same job. He is not going to prove himself at all. He is going to be completely accepted until he messes up. I will not be accepted until I can prove that I can do the job better than he can*"[3].

These are the most frequently mentioned reasons of the problems women face in workplaces because of the bias created by gender stereotypes. It is an undeniable fact that these biases affect the perception of the reactions to various kinds of situations the men and women are likely to encounter in workplaces. Thus when men react to something very fiercely, womens' reaction may be calm or vice versa. This difference in perception of the situations is reflected in their evaluations of statements. For example, when we look at the answer to the question, *"The mistakes and errors made by the female staff are continuously reminded to them,"* we see that there is a disagreement between the responses by men and women. While the response of the majority of men is "No", the majority of women say "Yes".

This is a common situation between two genders and can be seen in a lot of issues. On this issue, researcher Liswood says, *"How do you solve a conflict between two parties if one of the parties does not believe there is a problem, or only recognizes it as a small issue, while the other party sees a large and continuing problem? We all have our own lenses through which we see the world. Our window to the world is shaped by experience, hopefulness, unconscious beliefs, personal filters. The challenge becomes how to reconcile opposing and strongly held beliefs in the interest of improving a situation"* [5].

2. Method

Considering all above, it can be deducted that it is normal for different genders to think and behave differently. The statements in the 50-question MENTORESS survey are used to see if this deduction is right. In the evaluation part, it is seen that there is an agreement between the responses given by men and women in some questions, while there is a large discrepancy in some others. Only the questions with a discrepancy of over 20% in the responses for the same choice (Yes or No) are taken into consideration in this study with an eye to evaluate the perception of various situations by different genders correctly.

2.1 Discrepancy between the Responses from Men and Women

The first thing to be done is to check the number of questions where the discrepancy between the responses of men and women are high. To see this clearly, the table below is prepared. The percentage of disagreement between genders regarding the responses is shown in the table:

Table 1. Discrepancy between Responses by Different Genders.

Percentage of discrepancy between groups	Number of Questions	%
0-10	25	50
11-20	15	30
21-30	8	16
31-40	2	4

3. Findings

The following statements are those where the discrepancy between the responses from different genders is more than 20 %.

1. Male staff accepts women as equal on various tasks on board ships.

YES. F 27% M 54% Discrepancy 27%

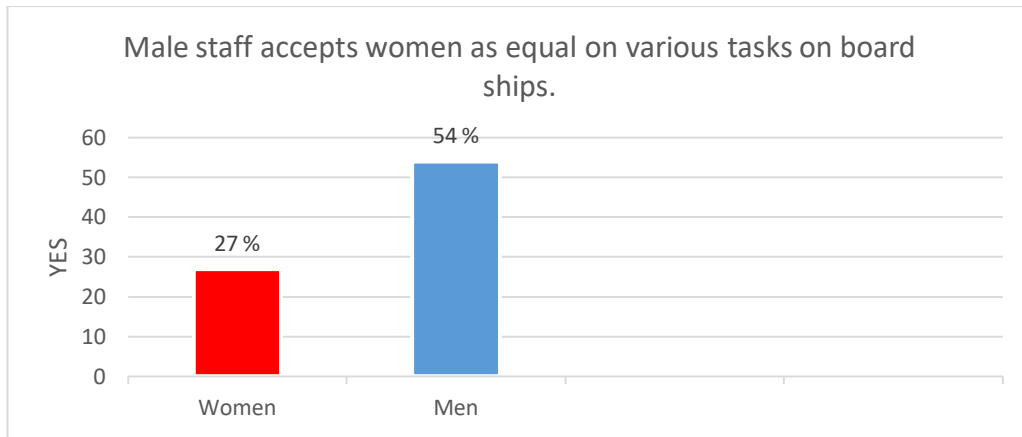


Figure 1. Comparison of responses for statement 1.

What men claim to do is different from what women perceive. For example, half of the men agree that women are equal to them when it comes to doing various jobs on board. However, the majority of women think that is not what men actually think. Only 27% of women in maritime think male staff accept them as equals onboard ships.

2. I would encourage other women to work in maritime sector.

YES. F 77% M 57% Discrepancy 20%

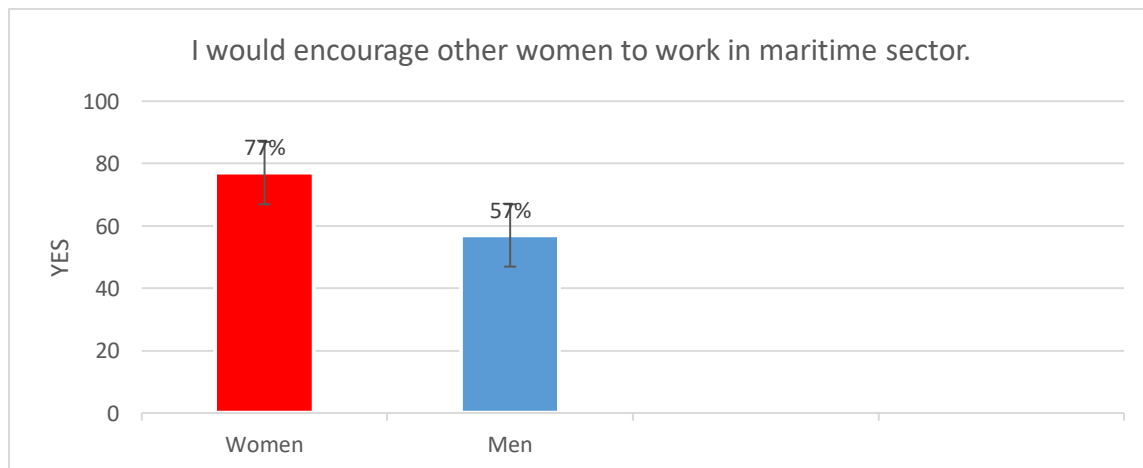


Figure 2. Comparison of responses for statement 2.

Considering that 77% of the women in maritime gave a positive answer to this question, it can be said that most women in maritime are content with their job and encourage other women to work in the same sector. On the other hand, men working with them aren't as positive as them when it comes to the existence of women in maritime since nearly half of them don't want to work with them in the sector.

3. The mistakes and errors made by the female staff are continuously reminded to them.

YES. F 62% M 39% Discrepancy 23%

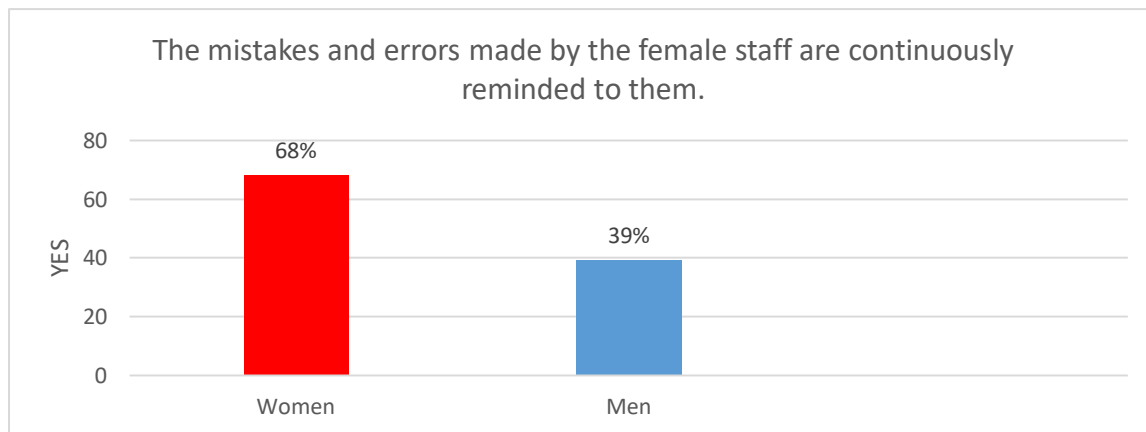


Figure 3. Comparison of responses for statement 3.

62% of women think their mistakes are reminded to them often which is a discouraging and, depending on the situation, humiliating behaviour. This may even be described in the frame of mobbing. The striking thing about this is that although there is a great amount of discrepancy, the percentage of men who accepted it is not too low to ignore. That is, even men in maritime (39%) think women suffer from mobbing.

4. The male counterparts perceive the female crew members as a threat in competition for better positions.

YES. F 68% M 34% Discrepancy 34%

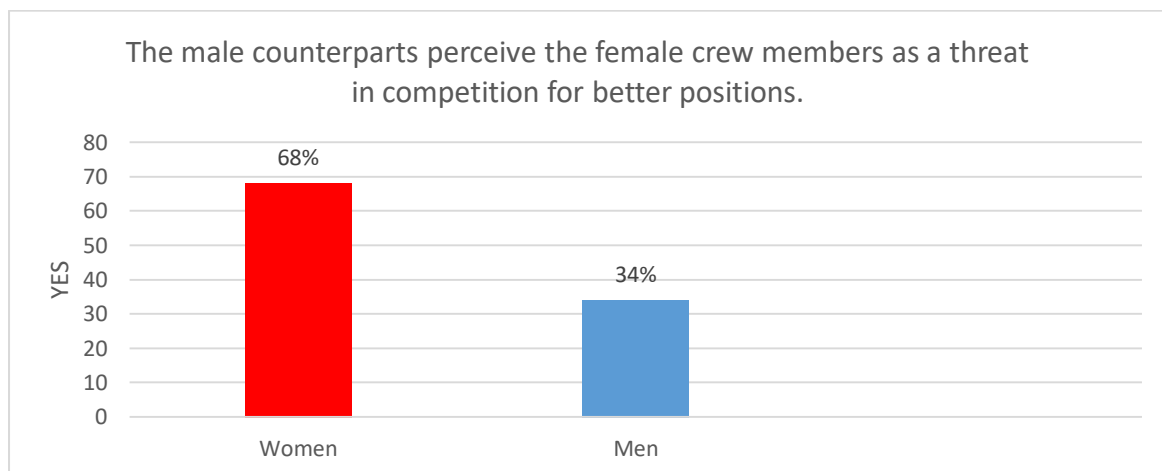


Figure 4. Comparison of responses for statement 4.

What is deduced from the uneven distribution of percentage of responses is that although men don't want to admit it, they take the presence of women onboard as a threat for their promotion. It is simply normal since they will have to share all the positions with women, who may have better qualities. They will be in competition with not only other men but also women on board. More candidates mean less chance for them to be promoted.

5. Men are preferred even if the female crew members have the same qualifications.

YES. F 82% M 61% Discrepancy 21%

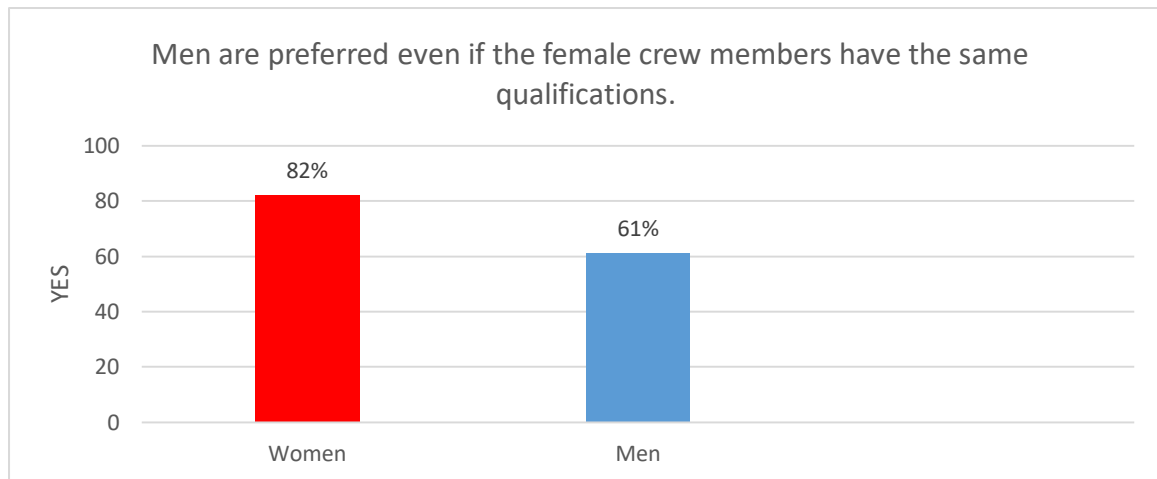


Figure 5. Comparison of responses for statement 5.

The percentage of women who agree with this statement is more than the men's percentage. That means women feel discrimination more when it comes to the distribution of jobs fairly. On the other hand, it is seen that the majority of men (more than 50%) agree, which signals the fact that there is some truth in that statement.

6. When a woman succeeds in her job, male staff will be jealous of her.

YES. F 81% M 44% Discrepancy 37%

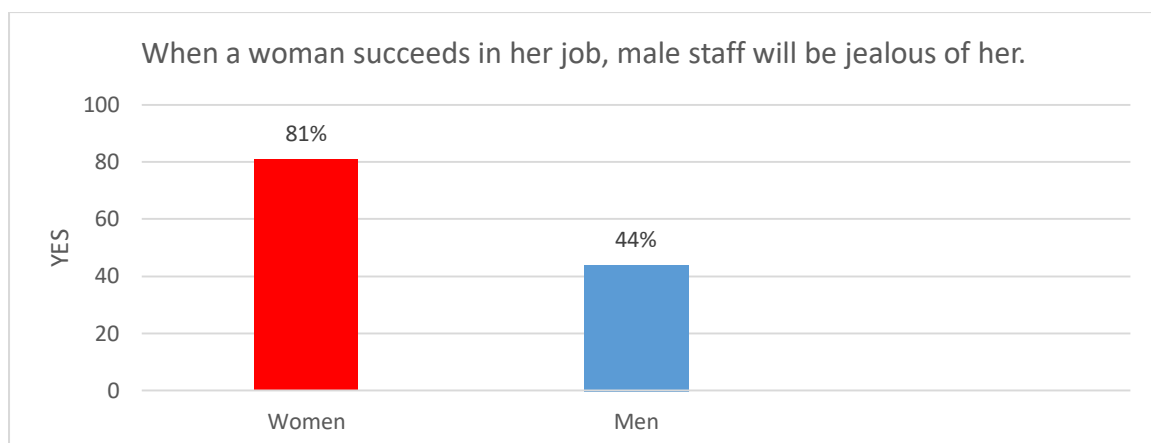


Figure 6. Comparison of responses for statement 6.

It's surprising to see that nearly half of the men accept the authenticity of this statement. It is not hard to guess how difficult it is to excel for women in such a tough workplace where the members of the opposite gender accept the hardness they face. People usually think it is commonplace for women to be jealous of each other, however in this situation men are jealous of them and what's more, they don't deny it.

7. The successful achievements of a female are usually ignored.

YES. F 64% M 40% Discrepancy 24%

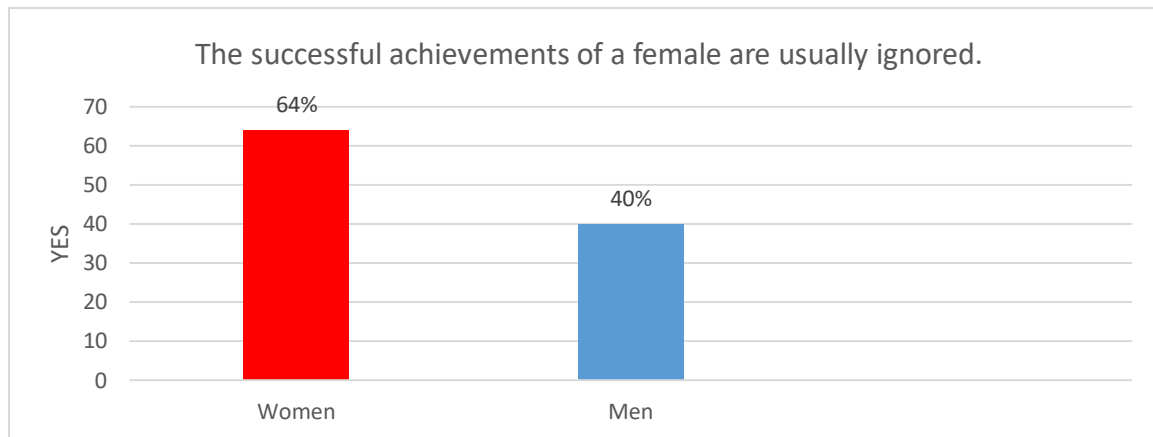


Figure 7. Comparison of responses for statement 7.

These kinds of complaints are often mentioned by women in maritime. As is seen the majority of women agree with the statement. On the other hand, there is a substantial amount of men who think the same. Taking this into consideration, it can be said that there is some truth in the statement that successful achievements of a female are not appreciated fairly.

8. When a female crew member makes a mistake, the feedback and reaction are exaggerated.

YES. F 70% M 43% Discrepancy 27%

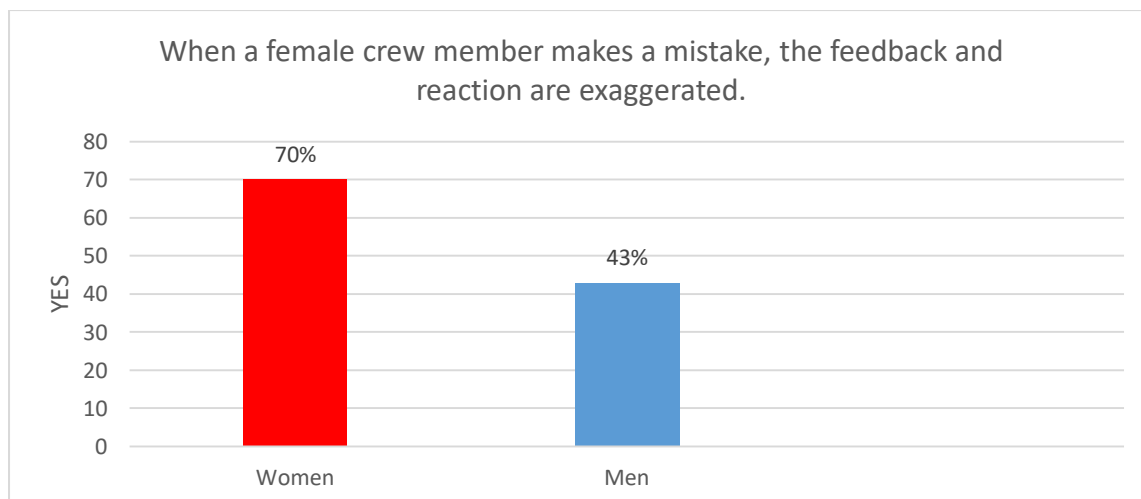


Figure 8. Comparison of responses for statement 8.

When mistakes are made by a person whose presence is approved by the others, their response is usually a calm reaction, if not ignoring the mistake. On the other hand, if there is a reverse situation, a situation where the presence of the people in question is not welcome, the mistakes are exaggerated. By taking the the high rate of the Yes proportion to this statement by women into consideration, it can be concluded that women are not welcome onboard ship and this can be deduced by the reaction towards their mistakes by the staff onboard ship.

9. The male colleagues believe that the presence of females onboard a ship will cause trouble there.

YES. F 84% M 61% Discrepancy 23%

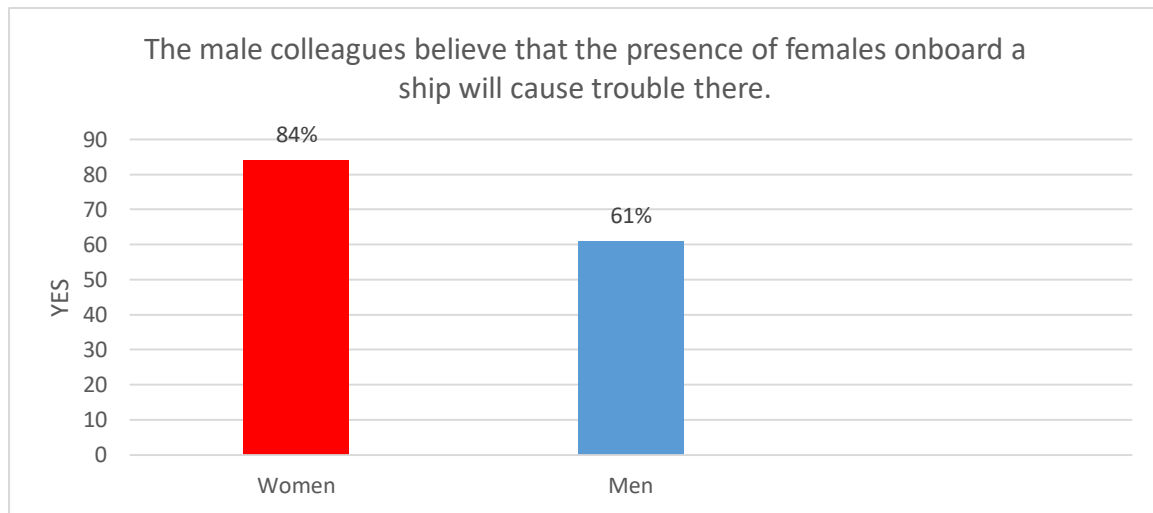


Figure 9. Comparison of Responses for Statement 9

This is the statement with the biggest rate of agreement by women. Strangely enough, men also confess that they agree with this statement. It must be a kind of biased idea since it goes without saying that women are as skilled as men and they can contribute to the welfare of the ship as much as men.

10. The decisions and ideas of female staff are continuously criticized and questioned.

YES. F 63% M 39% Discrepancy 24%

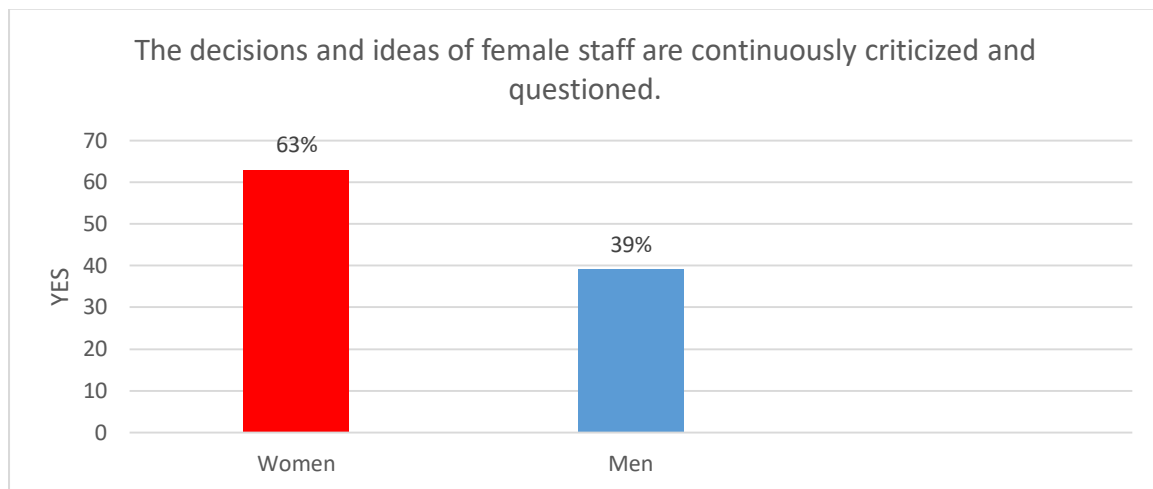


Figure 10. Comparison of responses for statement 10.

Most women feel that their decisions and ideas are criticized and questioned, and not all men disagree with this. They also feel that their ideas are greeted with suspicion. This is another sign of prejudice men may have against women, stemming from a lack of trust.

11. Women working at sea have less chance to be promoted to higher positions than men.

YES. F 70% M 49% Discrepancy 21%

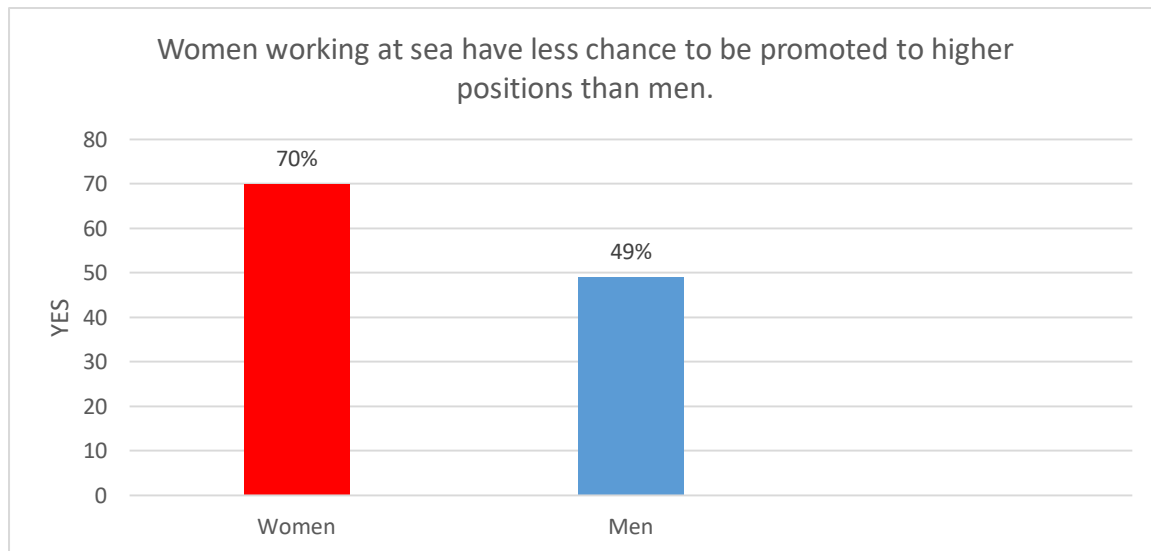


Figure 11. Comparison of responses for statement 11.

There may be various reasons for this. This may be because maritime is still seen as a men's job in the first place, or because the people in managerial positions think it might be hard for women to handle such a big group of men. Whatever the reason is, this requires women to have more leadership qualities.

On one hand, all the questions in concern are about the prejudice against women in maritime, on the other, it must be accepted that this is not something valid only in maritime but in all lines of work.

A study identified a number of circumstances under which the bias against women was more pronounced. Specifically, the women in leadership positions were devalued more strongly relative to their male counterparts when leadership was carried out in stereotypically masculine styles, particularly when this style was autocratic or directive. In addition, the devaluation of women was greater when leaders occupied male-dominated roles and when the evaluators were men [4].

Gender-stereotypic perceptions of women are especially disadvantageous precisely in these work settings, regarding the qualities of these occupations are thought to require [6]. Therefore antifemale bias, often functioning out of people's conscious awareness, should occur very often in such jobs. Stereotypical perceptions of women that underline this bias act as barriers inhibiting equality of opportunity, and the achievement of success in male-dominated occupations and masculine tasks more generally.

The acceleration of women's entry into these occupations makes it easy to understand why many women sense a backlash against them and an increase in anti-female prejudice. An increasing number of women are experiencing the disadvantage that gender-stereotypic perceptions produce because they spend considerable time in settings in which it is essential to be perceived as having agency.

On the other hand, the presence of women in all fields of occupation, including male-dominated ones, is increasing day by day. Recently, women's status and social roles have become more similar to men's and these changes have gained considerable ideological support [4]. Despite this, some women still think they are abused or they don't have as many rights as the men have in workplaces. This situation makes us think that there may be a situation that can be explained in terms of learned helplessness theory.

Learned helplessness is a phenomenon observed in both humans and other animals when they have been conditioned to expect pain, suffering, or discomfort without a way to escape it [7]. When human or other animals come to understand (or believe) that they have no control over what happens to them, they begin to think, feel, and act as if they are helpless. This phenomenon is called learned

helplessness because it is not an innate trait; no one is born believing that they have absolutely no control over what happens to them and that it is fruitless to even try to gain control. It is a learned behavior, conditioned through experiences in which the subject either truly has no control over his circumstances or believes that he has no control over his circumstances [8].

The fact that the women responding to the survey had a less positive approach to the statements, and that the discrepancy is high with the statements, may be because of learned helplessness on the part of the women. Women, affected by the culture they grow up in and by the reaction of men to them in maritime or male-dominated sectors, may not have a positive expectancy that conditions will change and the influence of this situation may be reflected in their responses to the statements. That is, even if the situation is not as bad as women depict, they may perceive it in this way.

4. Ways to Overcome Bias Created by Stereotyping

Effects of stereotyping can be observed not only in relationships in society and the workplaces but also in the motivation and performance levels of the workers. Of the two genders, the one who is affected the worse from stereotyping is women. Eliminating gender stereotypes will help the women improve their position both in society and in workplace. Unfortunately, this is a time-consuming process and cannot be solved overnight. To win the war against gender stereotyping, women need to be able to believe in their abilities and strengths. They can start by showing their capability and that there are more things that they can do equally well as men. [9].

Although stereotyping has already been in place for decades little headway has been made. The weight of scientific evidence demonstrates that children learn gender stereotypes from adults. As with gender roles, socializing agents—parents, teachers, peers, religious leaders, and the media—pass along gender stereotypes from one generation to the next [10]. To prevent this, some precautions targeting the children should be taken and gender equality subjects should be embedded in the curriculum of lessons from the early stages of education. Apart from this, gender equality must be emphasised at every platform such as social media, advertisements, bulletin boards, documentaries or TV programs so that public awareness can be raised on the subject. As public awareness grows, however, it will begin to be possible to allow for more, true gender equality in both children and adults [11]. The people in workplaces, too, should be educated about gender and gender bias. People often struggle to identify their own biases and areas of ignorance, but when they are made aware of them, it creates the possibility for positive change. Most people, given information that shows how they have treated another person unfairly, will want to do what they can to correct their behavior [12].

Another thing to be done to eliminate stereotyping is to encourage diversity. If staff sit in a conference room discussing how a new policy/process will affect the entire company and only men are present, ramifications that unfairly affect other genders will very probably be missed out on. Therefore people of different genders, races, backgrounds, etc., should be included so that decisions can be made in light of how they will affect everyone at the company, and not just one group or gender [12].

Encouraging the staff to do teamwork together such as a clublike activities is another alternative to eliminate bias. As the men and women of the staff share conversation, they grow to know and respect each other and their backgrounds. They are more ready to offer their information and insights on work-related topics and close teamwork throughout the staff development [13].

5. Conclusion

Gender bias created by stereotypes are influential in both social and work life of people. Maritime is no exception. Bias creates a negative atmosphere onboard ship as in all workplaces, and prevents the staff, especially female staff, from realizing their potential. As a result, ships are deprived of invaluable contributions women can make. Apart from this, this is demoralizing and has destructive effects on women such as creating anxiety, taking a dislike to work, hesitating to work at jobs where they are not welcome. This situation results in a decrease in the participation of women in maritime.

As the survey results indicate, biases created by stereotypes cause negative perceptions of the behaviours of women onboard ships. Survey results show there is a two-way negative misperception in the maritime sector. Negative biases of men against women may be the result of stereotyping effect while the negative thoughts of women concerning the behaviours of men may be the result of their negative experiences with men on board.

Overcoming the problems caused by gender stereotypes is not easy since it requires a long time to change them. Nevertheless, it shouldn't be forgotten that big changes start with small steps and some precautions to overcome the bias should be taken. To this end, communication among the people in maritime should be increased, as it is the best and most influential solution to the problem of misperception between the genders. By the increase in communication, people from all walks of life in maritime will have a chance to get to know and understand each other, develop the understanding among each other, indulge in their weaknesses and appreciate their strengths, which may give way to the creation of a strong and healthy working environment where all people are happy and productive.

Dealing with people is not easy. It is even more difficult for women in male-dominated workplaces, but whatever the hardships are, women must continue fighting for their rights. What the great basketball player Michael Jordan said can be the motto of the people who encounter hardships like the women in maritime do: "Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it" [14].

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