

Women Seafarer Indecision: Staying or Leaving?

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Abstract

The phenomenon of hidden discrimination practices in the recruitment of women seafarers, limited social interaction, and negative perceptions lead to hesitation to stay or leave their profession. The study examines various factors that are suspected to play a role in the decisions of women seafarers, as well as the meaning of state of well-being that they want. The study uses a qualitative case study approach, with a comparative interview technique on women seafarers who stay and who leave their jobs. The results of the study show that there are differences in the factors behind the decisions of women seafarers to stay and those who leave the profession. Differences in perspectives in the meaning of state of well-being were also found in this study.

Keywords: *Intention to Stay, Intention to Leave, Well-Being, Seafarer, Women.*

Introduction

The seafarer profession is a male-dominated occupation, and it is associated with various negative factors, including lengthy journeys, homesickness, inconvenient work schedules, inadequate social facilities, sleep disturbances, fatigue, pirate threats, and the obligation of operating within a limited social environment (Uğurlu et al, 2022). As of October 2024, the number of women seafarers in Indonesia reached 45,943 individuals, representing 3% of the total Indonesian seafarers (dephub.go.id, 2024). This suggests that women seafarers represent a minority in their respective careers. The minority status of women in this field makes it challenging for them to be accepted in the work environment, to receive adequate support and promotional opportunities, and to avoid intimidation from male colleagues (Islam et al, 2023). The perception that women seafarers should be employed exclusively in domestic waters has prompted several Indonesian shipping companies to be reluctant to hire them (dephub.go.id, 2019). Sadly, they also have reported that commercial shipping companies do not process their job applications (jawapos.com, 2018). Stakeholders have indicated that they have no doubt regarding the knowledge and ability of women seafarers, but have expressed reservations about their physical capabilities (parapuan.co, 2021). The motivation for women seafarers to stay in their careers is to challenge the prevailing stereotypes that they are weak, spoiled, and unreliable (Guo, 2019). The demanding nature of the work environment and the extended periods of absence from home contribute to a reluctance to leave the job (Zhao et al, 2021). In the teaching profession, South Asian seafarers who migrated to the UK, nursing school graduates, amateur seafarer trainees, and hotel employees, the decision to stay or leave work is motivated by individual (Shahid, 2018), organizational (Kim et al., 2022), work factor (Romelczyk et al., 2016), and cultural factor (Noor et al., 2024). However, no specific studies have been found on this among women seafarers.

The phenomenon of discrimination against Indonesian women seafarers can be attributed to the uncertainty surrounding the sustainability of their careers. The dearth of research that examines these issues in depth, coupled with the researchers' curiosity about the factors that drive women seafarers to either stay in or leave their roles, as well as the quality of life that they expect, serves as the catalyst for researchers to undertake a comprehensive investigation into these matters. Research on the interpretation of well-being among woman seafarers remains highly limited and has rarely been the focus of academic studies. Therefore, this study offers significant nobelty by providing a new perspective that is expected to enrich

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the scientific literature and support the development of knowledge about the lives of female seafarers. The objective of this study is to construct an appropriate model for Indonesian women seafarers who stay in or leave their positions. This model will serve as a valuable resource for commercial shipping companies, providing guidance on the standards for accepting women seafarers and offering insights to the government in the development of maritime policies related to women's empowerment.

Literature Review

Intention to stay (ITS) can be defined as the probability of individuals staying in an organization or workplace (Tsang et al, 2023). In the nursing profession, factors that contribute to ITS can be divided into two categories: organizational and job characteristics factors. Organizational factors include aspects such as decision-making style, organizational climate, organizational structure, organizational age, leadership support, and colleague support; while job characteristics factors encompass the availability of equipment and the safety and work environment conditions (Zamel, 2020). In the case of Vietnamese workers employed in Taiwan, individual factors (gender, age, educational level, marital status, and income) have been identified as motivating factors for ITS (Tsang et al, 2023). The ITS of hotel workers has been found to be motivated by individual (gender, length of work, level of education, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with financial rewards), organizational (organizational support, leaders, and colleagues), and job characteristics (shift work methods and unpaid overtime) factors (Akbiyik et al, 2018). The ITS model is depicted in Figure 1 below:

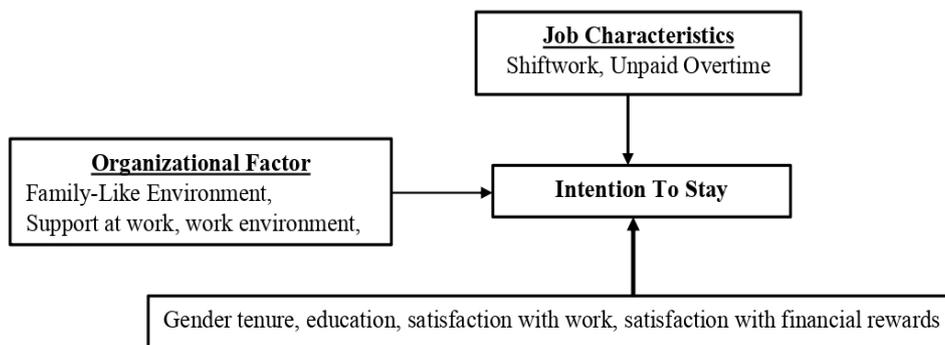


Figure 1. ITS Integration Model

Source: Akbiyik et al, 2018)

The ITS integrated model presented above provides an overview of the factors influencing the use of ITS by women seafarers in the context of maritime operations. In contrast to intention to leave (ITL), ITS represents a positive indicator of job satisfaction while ITL refers to an individual's deliberate intention to leave the organization (Kucukusta et al, 2022). It is crucial to enhance the understanding of the multifaceted elements that shape ITL (Magrone et al, 2024). This include individual factors (physical and mental health) (Vries et al, 2024), job satisfaction and quality of work life (Tsang et al, 2023), organizational factors (friction with colleagues) (Gekara et al, 2021), demographics and organizational commitment (Tsang et al, 2023), cultural factors (patriarchy) (Szoltysek, 2022), masculinity norms (Gekara et al, 2022) and job factors (intensive work environment) (Tsang et al, 2023). ITL is defined as the impact of boredom due to work-home interferences (Bakker et al, 2024). It is initiated by an individual's resignation from their department, subsequently from their organization, and ultimately from their profession (Zamel et al, 2020). The theoretical model of ITL by Bakker et al (2024) elucidates the following research question: "What are factors influencing the decision of women seafarers to leave their jobs?" The model is presented in Figure 2 below:

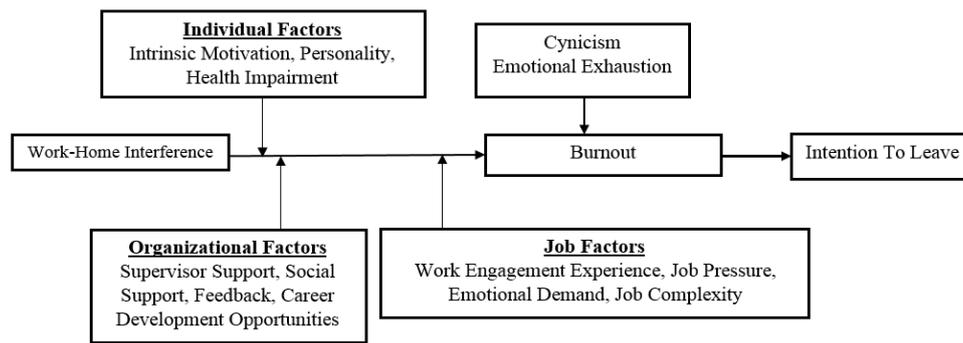


Figure 2. IIL Theoretical Model

Source: Bakker et al, 2024

Several women prefer seafarers as a profession to pursue a career at sea, whereas others opt for this profession as a means of entering a new occupation (Wu et al, 2017). This is done with the objective of attaining the desired level of well-being in one's life. Those with high life well-being will not encounter challenges in their decision-making regarding career sustainability. Conversely, individuals with low life well-being will experience indecision (Pignault et al, 2023). Life well-being is an individual's subjective sense of comfort, based on a number of factors, including evaluations of physical, social, organizational, and environmental factors (Tang et al, 2024), physical health, psychological well-being (Yuh et al., 2017), perceived fatigue, family role balance, opportunities for competency development, and relationships with partners (O'Reilly, 2017).

Research Metodologi And Data

This research employed a qualitative case study approach. In accordance with the guidelines set forth by Miles and Huberman (2014), this research is oriented towards: 1) a comprehensive overview of the research design; 2) a detailed account of the research methodology, with a particular focus on the empirical studies and the arguments presented regarding the experiences and behaviors of informants; and 3) a systematic elaboration of the conclusions drawn from the research. The data was collected through in-depth interviews. This study involved a total of 12 informants, consisting of five women seafarers who decided to stay in the profession (ET, PV, DJ, YT, and RO) and seven women seafarers who had left the job (NI, AM, FS, ES, EN, WU, and DY). The informants were selected using the snowball sampling method and informed of the following aspects of the research: 1) title, 2) duration of the activity, 3) research objectives and benefits, 4) role of the informants; 5) stages of the activity, 6) guarantee of confidentiality, and 7) information on the opportunity to resign at any time. The data processing stage of this research adhered to the methodology proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which encompasses data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Research Results

Factors Influencing the ITS of Women Seafarers

In the context of women seafarers, family and motivation were identified as key factors influencing their decision-making process. In their respective opinions, ET, DJ and PV stated that:

“The provision of support to children in the context of their participation in school activities, including the offering of assistance with learning, the avoidance of judgment, the active listening to of concerns related to work, and the consistent encouragement of children, are all key functions fulfilled by partners and extended family members.”

YT and RO agreed that:

“The motivation to stay in a position is driven by a number of factors, including a desire to contribute to the implementation of social policy, the aspiration to act as a role model, a need to demonstrate one’s capabilities, a passion for one’s chosen career, and the desire to achieve financial stability.”

ET, RO, PV, and YT revealed another background to ITS:

“The significance of seafarers’ comprehension of ethical standards, social norms, organizational hierarchy, and effective communication techniques is underscored by the influence of cultural and linguistic diversities. The minority status and social isolation of women seafarers do not impede the demonstration of professional competence and responsibility. In addition to the aforementioned factors, the ability to demonstrate mastery of ship management knowledge and a sense of solidarity are also crucial for advancement in this field.”

ET added:

“An anti-discriminatory work environment, defined by the presence of key attributes such as equal treatment, respect, a family-like atmosphere, and career development support, has been shown to foster a sense of comfort, security, and commitment among employees, thereby enhancing their desire to remain with the organization.”

DJ , YT and RO supported and stated:

“The autonomy afforded to mariners includes the freedom to utilize optimal safe navigation techniques, to assume a leadership role in the management of distressed ships, and to exercise independent judgment in the loading and unloading of ship cargo.”

RO and PV added:

“It is prudent to remain with a company that provides its ships with quality work and safety equipment.”

Based on the assessment of informants’ statements, it can be determined that the factors influencing the ITS of women seafarers can be attributed to three primary categories: individual, organizational, and work factors. Individual factors encompass motivation, career aspirations, family support, cultural quotient, and sociocultural adaptation. Organizational factors include social support, autonomy, career development opportunities, supervisor support, and family-like atmosphere. Work factors, on the other hand, pertain to the availability of equipment, safety, and work environment conditions.

Factors Influencing the IITL of Women Seafarers

NI, AM, FS, ES, EN, WU, and DY had previously worked as seafarers. They outlined the various factors that led to IITL. NI, WU, and DY put forth the following argument:

“The decision to terminate employment was motivated by a decline in stamina and an increase in health issues.”

AM and FS stated:

“The extended period of separation from my partner resulted in a persistent state of discord. Ceasing participation in seafaring activities represents an effort to achieve a state of equilibrium with regard to the various roles one assumes in life. Maintaining proximity to one’s family is the best option.”

DY, EN and ES added:

“The necessity to comply with an array of regulations contributes to the intricacy of the role. The traditional masculine norms and expectations associated with this role are no longer aligned with my personal values

and preferences. The potential for accidents, fires, and piracy makes it challenging to maintain a long-term commitment to the role. I am experiencing a considerable degree of physical and emotional exhaustion.”

AM stated:

“The work style of seafarers does not suit my preferences. I feel unproductive.”

FS and NI explained:

“The irregularity of the payroll schedule presents a challenge for me in managing my personal finances.”

ES and EN elaborated:

“The fact that my suggestions were not heard solely on the basis of my gender led to conflicts with other seafarers, which subsequently resulted in ongoing tensions.”

The testimonies of women seafarers who had left their profession indicate that there are four factors that contributed to their decision to leave their jobs. These factors can be classified into four categories: individual (health, family conflict, marital status, burnout, and personality), organizational (job pressure, payroll system inconsistency, job complexity, and friction with colleagues), work (job context, job risk, and job masculinity), and cultural (patriarchal culture and the principle of togetherness) factors.

Women Seafarers' State of Well-Being

A discrepancy was observed between the perspectives of women seafarers who stayed in their positions and those who had left. ET, PV, DJ, YT, and RO held a number of different views. ET, RO, and PV offered the following responses:

“I am grateful to have the opportunity to meet my personal and familial obligations. It is a means of attaining prosperity.”

PV and YT stated:

“My experience as a women seafarer has afforded me economic autonomy and enhanced my self-assurance.”

ET, PV, DJ, YT, and RO agreed and stated:

“The greatest achievement is inspiring the younger generation that women can succeed in the seafarer profession.”

Further, the women seafarers who had left their careers, NI, AM, FS, ES, EN, WU, and DY, offer a different interpretation of well-being. NI, EN, FS, and AM stated:

“I am extremely happy to report that I no longer experience the physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that previously characterized my work experience. This has afforded me the opportunity to dedicate more time to my personal well-being.”

ES added:

“I am no longer afflicted by minor health issues resulting from exposure to extreme weather conditions that I previously encountered.”

WU and DY stated:

“I experienced an improvement in my emotional well-being following a change in employment. I am better able to fulfill my responsibilities as a family member by being present for my family more often.”

For those who stayed in their roles, the concept of well-being was based on the fulfilment of financial needs, the maintenance of independence and the role of social exemplar. For those who left their positions, their well-being was contingent upon the presence of minimal burnout, minimal dual role conflict, and good physical health. The following is a comprehensive qualitative model, which has been successfully compiled based on the research results.

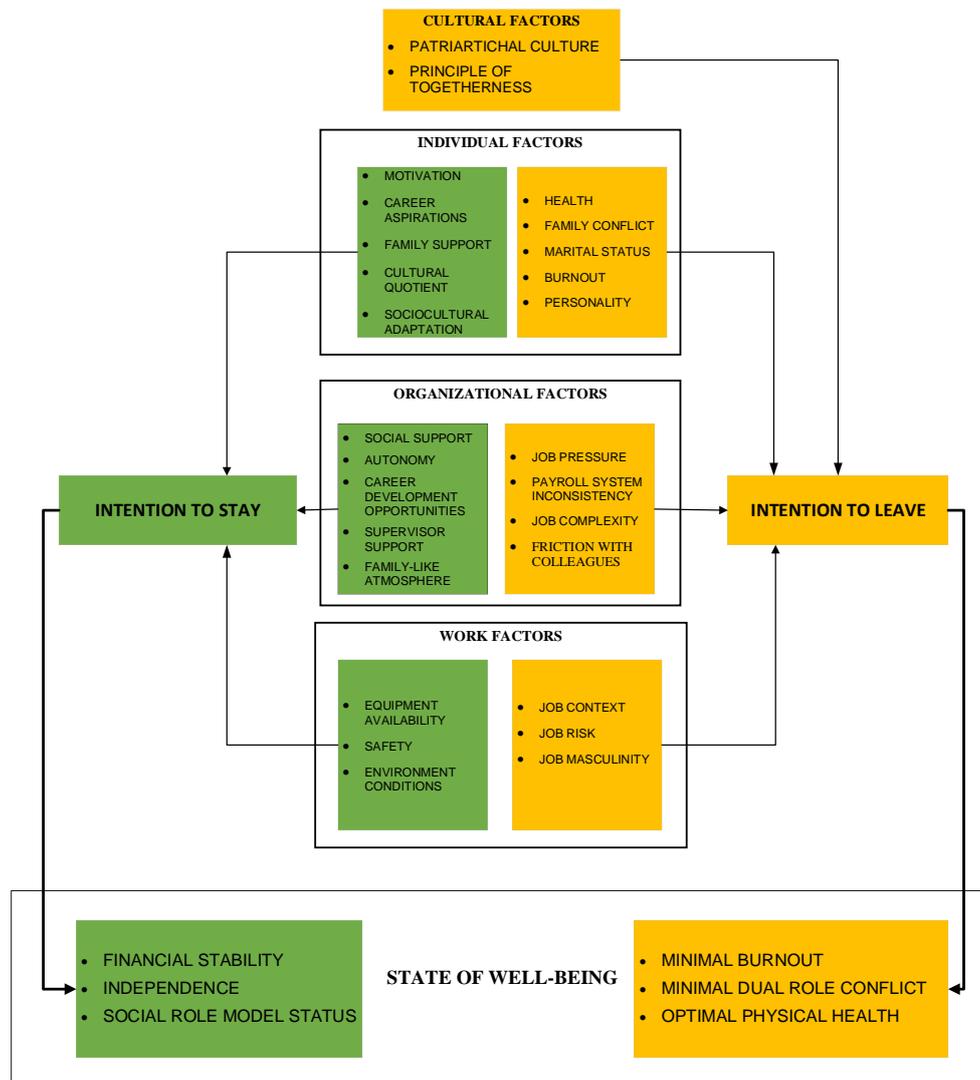


Figure 3. A Comprehensive Qualitative Model of ITS, ITL, and State of Well-Being of Women Seafarers

Source: empirical research results

The Proposition that can be formulated based on the conducted study include:

- There are differences in the types of factors underlying ITS and those underlying ITL among women seafarers.
- There are differing perspective between women seafarers who stay in the profession and those who have leave their seafarers career in defining state of well being.

Discussion

The decision-making process concerning the long-term viability of women in maritime professions was contingent upon a multitude of pivotal elements. The ITS of women seafarers was based on a combination of individual, organizational, and occupational factors. The role of individual factors, including motivation, career aspirations, family support, cultural quotient, and sociocultural adaptation, in the ITS of women seafarers was consistent with the findings of Shahid (2018), Liu et al (2023) and Tariq (2024). These studies suggested that individuals with directional motivation were more likely to stay in their positions. (Borquez et al, 2023) and Yang (2022) provided further support for this finding by stating that family support encouraged individuals to persist. Further, Tsang et al (2023) and Scarpi et al (2022) posited that an individual's sociocultural adaptation would enhance their attachment to the workplace. The results of the research on organizational factors (social support, supervisor support, and family-like atmosphere) behind the ITS of women seafarers were in alignment with the findings of Galanis et al (2023), which indicated that social support, leadership support, colleague support, and a positive environment contributed to the formation of an attachment to ones work. Furthermore, Penconek et al (2024) and Julia et al (2024) explained that autonomy fostered a sense of control in individuals, thereby enhancing their motivation to stay in their position. Hosen et al (2024) corroborated this argument, proposing that career development opportunities served to diminish the likelihood of an individual's intention to relocate. The results of researches that were consistent with the findings that work factors (availability of equipment, safety and environmental conditions of work) were behind the ITS of women seafarers are those of Kona et al (2023), which stated that individuals would remain in a situation when they feel safe. Vries et al (2023) and Cardona et al (2023) also indicated that the presence of adequate equipment and a positive work environment were conducive to individual survival.

Further, there were notable distinctions between the underlying factors influencing the ITS and ITL of women seafarers. The motivation behind their ITL was influenced by a multitude of factors, including individual, organizational, work-related, and cultural elements. Individual factors, including health, family conflict, marital status, burnout, and personality, had been identified as contributing to the background of women seafarers' ITL. This aligned with the findings of Alsubhi et al (2020), which indicated that family conflict and continuous burnout were associated with an increased desire to resign. In alignment with the viewpoint that challenges in reconciling the demands of work and family responsibilities led to a desire to leave from one's professional role, Donoso (2021) offered a corroborating perspective. Vries et al (2024) further reinforced this argument by stating that physical, mental health, and burnout were the underlying factors of ITL. Greinacher et al (2023) reached a similar conclusion, indicating that the incompatibility of individual personalities with job characteristics resulted in the intention to leave work. The organizational factors (job pressure, payroll system inconsistency, job complexity, and friction with colleagues) that contributed to women seafarers' ITL were consistent with the findings of previous researches conducted by Jasinski et al (2023) and Vries et al (2024). These studies identified conflicts with colleagues, job demands that exceeded one's capacity, and other work-related factors as key contributors to the ITL. The results align with the findings of Awan et al (2021), which indicated that managing job risks was crucial for reducing individual ITL. This was particularly evident in the context of work factors, including work context, job risk, and job masculinity, which emerged as key underlying causes of ITL among women seafarers. The results of this research indicate that cultural factors, specifically a patriarchal culture and the principle of togetherness, were associated with the ITL among women seafarers. These findings also align with those of Rawat et al (2014) and Nooe et al (2024), who posited that patriarchal hierarchies in the workplace and limitations on women's career advancement contributed to the ITL.

In the context of state of well-being, women seafarers who stayed in the job often perceived the experience as a source of financial stability, independence, and social role model status. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Pak et al (2023) and Zang et al (2023), who revealed that independence, financial stability, the number of assets, the capacity to fulfill personal needs, and role model status within the community contributed to individual well-being. With regard to women seafarers who left, well-being was defined by the absence of burnout, the absence of dual role conflict, and physical health. These findings align with those of Cohen et al (2023) and Pike et al (2023), arguing that minimal burnout, low dual role conflict, and

avoidance of risky work environments were conducive to improved physical well-being, life balance, and overall well-being.

Conclusions

This study examines the factors that contribute to the differences in the women seafarers' ITS and ITL. The motivation behind ITS in women seafarers could be attributed to a multitude of factors, including individual (motivation, career aspirations, family support, cultural quotient, and sociocultural adaptation) and organizational (social support, autonomy, career development opportunities, supervisor support, and family-like atmosphere), and work (equipment availability, safety, and work environment conditions) factors. Meanwhile, their ITL was also motivated by a number of factors, including individual (health, family conflict, marital status, burnout, and personality), organizational (job pressure, payroll system inconsistency, job complexity, and friction with colleagues), work (job context, job risk, and job masculinity), and cultural (patriarchal culture and the principle of togetherness) factors. In the context of their state of well-being, women seafarers who stayed in their position interpreted it in terms of financial well-being, independence, and social role model status. In contrast, women seafarers who left their careers tended to report high levels of well-being when they experienced minimal burnout, minimal dual role conflict, and optimal physical health. Findings of this study are expected to provide empirical data that can serve as a basis for the government in formulating maritime policies related to empowering women in the seafarer profession. Furthermore, the findings of this study can also serve as a reference for commercial shipping companies in implementing standard employee recruitment policies. Theoretically, the findings of this study lend support to the theoretical framework proposed by Bakker et al (2023), which posited that both work-related and individual factors influence an individual's decision to leave their job. Additionally, this study has faced a limitation which was related to the relatively small number of women seafarers who participated. Therefore, future researches are suggested to involve a larger number of women seafarers as informants.

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