

## Silent Voices: Prevalence, Effects, and Responses to Bullying among Shipboard Cadets

Emeliza T. Estimo<sup>1,\*</sup>, Joanna S. Gudio<sup>1</sup>, Justin Karl C. Nuyad<sup>1</sup>, Neomi C. Paragsa<sup>1</sup>, Ahron Gabriel J. Villamil<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Bullying on board ships critically undermines seafarers' mental health and operational safety. This study examined the various forms of bullying experienced by cadets onboard maritime vessels, the extent to which they were affected by bullying, and how they coped with it. A descriptive design was employed, primarily utilizing quantitative data collected through surveys, supplemented by actual statements from participants obtained during individual interviews. *Frequency* and *Rank* were used to analyze forms of bullying, while *mean* and *standard deviation* were employed to measure the extent to which bullying was experienced. Coping strategies were thematized based on interview responses. The findings revealed a high extent of bullying, with verbal bullying, discrimination, and physical bullying being the most common. Various bullying situations took these forms, with the most severe being excessively criticizing a crew member through derogatory language, insults, or threats. Cadets primarily drew on the emotional support of family, friends, and colleagues to cope and exercised relaxation skills. The study concluded that bullying does indeed occur on board, and cadets employ personal coping measures to address it. Recommendations were put forth to augment anti-bullying policies and implement compulsory training programs to ensure a respectful and inclusive maritime workplace culture.

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## 1. Introduction.

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Seafaring is stereotyped as a man's job and is deeply influenced by the notion that those who choose this path must be tough enough to face its harsh realities. Historically, young individuals were welcomed aboard ships to be mentored, assimilated, and, unfortunately, subjected to bullying within their work environment (Froholdt, 2023). Extensive research has revealed that the maritime environment is susceptible to workplace bullying and harassment due to its nature, characterized by sustained high workload, role conflicts, jargon, and precarious work (Österman & Boström, 2022). This was supported by Lefkowitz and Slade (2019) and Hoel and Vartia (2018), who emphasized the extent of bullying among seafarers, which

was observed to be high, resulting in high stress, anxiety, and suicidal behavior. Bullying is a critical matter that can have adverse effects on the well-being, safety, and productivity of workers in maritime settings (Galanakis, 2024). Additionally, gender inequality in the labor market leads to women being mostly targeted by work bullying and harassment in a disproportionate manner. This risk is worsened when women work in male-dominated professions or environments where their presence challenges traditional notions of masculinity (International Labour Organization, 2018). In addition, workers in vulnerable employment contexts, including cadets on board or those employed on short-term contracts or subcontract basis, are exposed to increased risks (Österman & Boström, 2022). These results highlight the importance of workplace bullying and enhancing mental well-being in the maritime sector.

### 1.2. Objectives.

This study offers insights into bullying as an existing phenomenon on board, particularly experienced by maritime cadets.

<sup>1</sup> John B. Lacson Colleges Foundation (Bacolod), Inc. Philippines.

\*Corresponding author: Emeliza T. Estimo. E-mail Address: [emeliza.estimo@jblfmu.edu.ph](mailto:emeliza.estimo@jblfmu.edu.ph).

By comprehensively understanding the dynamics, prevalence, and impacts of bullying, this study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform the development of effective policies, prevention strategies, and support systems to help create a safer and more inclusive maritime industry, promoting the well-being and dignity of all maritime professionals. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What forms of bullying have the cadets experienced on board?
2. To what extent did they experience bullying on board?
3. What are the effects of bullying on cadets?
4. What strategies did they adopt to cope with the impact of bullying onboard?

### 1.3. Conceptual Framework.

The central focus of this study, shown in Figure 1, is bullying on board, which takes different forms and leads to situations and effects. The diagram highlights the importance of coping strategies for the victims and anti-bullying measures to prevent and address the issue.

Forms of bullying include *verbal bullying* (e.g., insults and threats), *physical bullying* (e.g., physical aggression or forced labor), *social bullying* (e.g., exclusion and rumor-spreading), *psychological bullying* (e.g., intimidation and manipulation), and *hierarchical bullying*, where authority figures misuse their power. Each form of bullying could impact the cadets.

The consequences of bullying may be experienced both at the personal and workplace levels. They may occur in various circumstances, such as hazardous working environments, workplace disputes with colleagues or supervisors, or social exclusion. The consequences are *emotional distress*, *poor work performance*, *anxiety*, *depression*, and, in the worst-case scenario, *suicidal thoughts*. The undesirable consequences may greatly impede cadets' professional development and interfere with general morale at sea.

As a coping response to being bullied, cadets *use some form of social support*, *take care of themselves*, *report cases to their seniors*, or *avoid confrontations* entirely. Avoidance increases feelings of isolation and stress.

*anti-bullying policies*, *ensuring leadership training under positive mentorship*, *developing secure reporting lines*, and *sensitizing cadets and upper-level crew personnel on appropriate respectful behavior and professionalism*. The dual exploration of the aforementioned factors through the schematic diagram draws out the multifaceted dynamics among bullying activities, their implications, and proactive measures in promoting a more supportive and safe maritime training setting.

### 1.4. Theoretical Framework.

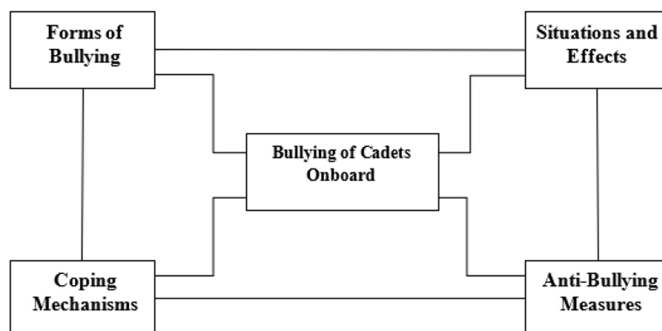
The Social Learning Theory, Organizational Culture Theory, and Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model provide a comprehensive understanding of bullying in maritime settings.

The Social Learning Theory emphasizes that behavior, including bullying, is learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement from others within a social context. People tend to model behaviors they observe in their environment, especially when these behaviors are performed by individuals in positions of authority or influence (Feather, 2021). Within the maritime industry, cadets often observe and internalize behaviors exhibited by senior crew members, including harassment and bullying (Çelik Maşalacı, 2024). If such behaviors were tolerated, overlooked, or even rewarded within the professional culture, cadets might perceive them as acceptable, perpetuating a cycle of bullying. This theory also explains how punitive or aggressive behaviors could be passed down through generations of seafarers, as cadets who experience bullying during training could later repeat the same behaviors when they become senior crew members.

Organizational Culture Theory would assume that values, norms, beliefs, and practices shared within an organization would determine behavior and interactions among people working there. Wang et al. (2023) had maintained that organizational culture is created over some time and by leadership behavior, past practices, and experiences shared by workers. In the maritime context, traditionally, a masculine and hierarchical culture tends to perpetuate imbalances of power, whereby upper-level crew command cadets and, on occasions, may dominate them by intimidation and bullying. This hypothesis elucidates how thoroughly ingrained in the culture value systems of strength, durability and experiential expertise would be likely to normalize untoward behaviors while stifling reporting behavior among cadets. In addition, Organizational Culture Theory emphasizes the significance of leadership in creating a positive or negative work culture (Tran, 2021). If leadership supports or disregards bullying activities, it encourages a cycle in which harassment is regarded as part of professional growth. Thus, altering workplace culture demands policy measures and leadership attitude changes to create a more respectful and supportive culture for cadets.

The Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) Model describes the connection between job demands, decision-making control, and social support with work-related stress and bullying. It suggests that employees feel most stressed when job demands are high, control over work is low, and social support is lacking (Ricciardelli & Carleton, 2022). Due to the extended working

Figure 1: Paradigm of the Study.



Source: Authors.

The illustration further highlights anti-bullying protocols to curb or minimize bullying. These may incorporate *enacting*

hours, physical demands, and workload, cadets may be subjected to high-stress work environments. A compound factor is the scarcity of decision-making choices and little control over working conditions, as they tend to be in subordinate positions. Without social support from their colleagues and supervisors, the vulnerability to bullying is compounded, as cadets have few avenues to look for assistance or dispute resolution. The JDCS model points out the mechanism by which such factors create psychological stress, which leads to vulnerability to harassment. It also indicates the function of strong social support systems and gives cadets greater decision-making authority to reduce bullying incidents and improve overall well-being.

Employing these theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex nature of bullying at sea among cadets. The Organizational Culture Theory and Social Learning Theory were useful in determining how cadets perceived and learned bullying behaviors by emphasizing observed behavior and workplace culture on individual behavior. The JDCS Model provided insight into the prevalence and effects of bullying by placing importance on stress and psychological burden caused by high job demands, low control, and poor support that were common in sea work environments. All these theories together led the research into an investigation of coping strategies and the efficacy of anti-bullying interventions with a focus on the necessity of systemic reforms and increased leadership development to create a safer maritime sector.

## 2. Methodology.

### 2.1. Research Design.

A Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods Approach was employed to explain the bullying experiences of cadets on board and how they impacted their well-being and work performance. Owa (2023) states that a mixed-method approach integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more accurate understanding of complex concepts. In this approach, the researcher combines quantitative and qualitative components simultaneously in the same stage of the research process, maintains parity between methods, analyzes each element independently, and integrates both outcomes for interpretation (Alele & Malau-Aduli, 2023). In this research, quantitative data were collected via the survey technique. Qualitative data, specifically on the consequences of bullying among cadets, were collected through individual interviews.

### 2.2. Respondents.

The study's respondents were deck and engine cadets enrolled in a maritime school in the Philippines who were deployed onboard different vessels of different shipping companies during their shipboard training. These cadets were asked to participate in the survey to identify the bullying they experienced onboard. Five deck and five engine cadets who admitted to having directly experienced bullying were purposively selected by the researchers for the interview phase of the study, particularly on the effects of bullying.

### 2.3. Research Instrument.

A researcher-made questionnaire was used in this study based on the instrument "Evaluating Bullying Effect on The Happiness and Performance of The Ship's Crew" by Albreiki and Behforouzi (2021). The questionnaire was divided into six parts. Part 1 was designed to gather the respondents' personal information, which included their name (optional), age, gender, degree program, contact number, and email address. Part 2 contained the different Forms of Bullying for which the cadets were asked to tick those they had experienced onboard. Part 3 contained Bullying Situations the cadets have experienced or witnessed onboard.

Part 4 was an open-ended part of the survey, where the respondents were asked about the effects of bullying on them. Part 5 included a list of coping strategies, for which the cadets were asked to tick the ones they adopted to cope with the effects of bullying.

Content and Face Validity were performed using the Content Validity Ratio (CVR). Three validators evaluated the survey items, and only those unanimously agreed upon as essential were retained for the final survey. The survey instrument obtained a validity rating of 4.9, which is interpreted as excellent.

As for reliability, Part 3 of the survey questionnaire, which utilized a Likert Scale, obtained the following reliability indices using Cronbach's alpha as analyzed by the statistician: Bullying Situations (.821), interpreted as Good, indicating the instrument was reliable.

### 2.4. Data Gathering Procedure.

The researchers developed an electronic version of the survey questionnaire, created and hosted on the JotForm platform to ensure accessibility and ease of distribution. This web-based approach enabled the researchers to access a larger number of respondents more effectively. The survey link was shared via Facebook Messenger, a popular mode of communication among the target population, making it convenient for respondents to access and complete the survey at their convenience. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software package was used to ensure precision and consistency in the data analysis.

After the survey, the researchers proceeded with the qualitative phase to gain a deeper understanding of the personal experiences of cadets who had experienced bullying onboard. Through purposive sampling, ten cadets (five deck and five engine) who experienced bullying were interviewed in-depth. This non-random sampling method was employed to ensure the participation of individuals with firsthand experience of the phenomenon being investigated, thereby providing richer data for qualitative analysis.

Throughout the interview process, the researchers utilized a dual data collection method to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the information obtained. The responses were voice-recorded, with the participants' permission, and transcribed into written form for analysis. This ensured that the participants' narratives were captured correctly while maintaining the authenticity of their experiences. The qualitative data obtained

supplemented the survey results, providing additional insight into onboard forms, effects, and ways of coping with bullying.

### 2.5. Statistical Treatment/Data Analysis.

The researchers employed *Frequency* and *Rank* for Research Problems 1, 4, and 5. For Research Problem 2, *the Mean and Standard Deviation* were used to analyze the respondents' extent of Bullying Situations Onboard. To interpret the mean score, the following scale was used:

| Mean Score Range | Interpretation |
|------------------|----------------|
| 4.21 – 5.00      | Very High      |
| 3.41 – 4.20      | High           |
| 2.61 – 3.40      | Moderate       |
| 1.81 – 2.60      | Low            |
| 1.00 – 1.80      | Very Low       |

Thematic Analysis was used to analyze the data for Research Problem 3. Elmansy (2023) defines Thematic Analysis as a qualitative research technique used to find, examine, and analyze patterns or themes in a dataset, such as written texts, transcripts of interviews, or survey results.

### 2.6. Ethical Considerations

The electronic copy of the survey questionnaire included instructions for the participants to read and understand the terms and conditions before answering the survey. For the survey questionnaire and the interview, the participants fully volunteered and were not forced by the researchers. The researchers took full responsibility for protecting and keeping the personal information of participants confidential, ensuring that the data gathered were used only for this research and was treated with meticulous attention to detail and stringent protocols to ensure its integrity and security.

## 3. Results and Discussion.

### 3.1. Forms of Bullying Cadets Experienced Onboard

The forms of bullying the cadets experienced onboard, as shown in Table 1, yielded 62 responses. Verbal bullying was the most frequently reported form (mentioned by 48% of the cadets), followed by *discrimination* (29%) and *physical bullying* (10%). *Psychological/Relational bullying* and *sexual harassment* each accumulated 7% of the responses, while no one has experienced *cyberbullying*.

This high percentage attributed to verbal harassment, where the most commonly reported bullying behaviors were *excessive criticism through derogatory language, insults, or threats*, and *consistent undermining of their perceptions* leading to self-doubt and a decline in confidence, and the *use of rank or position to abuse and belittle them verbally*, is alarming as it often leads to severe psychological trauma among the crew and consequently compromises crew effectiveness through diminished

Table 1: Forms of Bullying Cadets Experienced Onboard.

| Forms of Bullying                 | Frequency Count | Percentage Distribution | Rank |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------|
| Physical Bullying                 | 6               | 10%                     | 3    |
| Verbal Bullying                   | 30              | 48%                     | 1    |
| Discrimination                    | 18              | 29%                     | 2    |
| Psychological/Relational Bullying | 4               | 6.5%                    | 4.5  |
| Cyberbullying                     | 0               | 0%                      | 6    |
| Sexual Harassment                 | 4               | 6.5%                    | 4.5  |

Source: Authors.

morale (Sanz-Trepiana et al., 2024). Verbal bullying has a negative impact on the well-being and productivity of its targets (Suggala et al., 2019). This form of harassment can make the workplace experience intolerable, raising stress and depressing employee morale (Schneider et al., 2022).

After direct verbal harassment, 29% of respondents reported unfair treatment, indicating potential discrimination in the workplace. Such discriminator behaviors can intensify loneliness as well as temper the morale of the crew in general (Brandt et al., 2022). Physical bullying through reported physical aggression or assault by an officer who misused their authority to assert dominance was mentioned by 10% of the cadets. This behavior may reflect the hierarchical nature of maritime work, where authority figures may misuse their power to control subordinates. Although it is less frequent than verbal bullying, it poses a considerable danger to the victim's safety (Cregan & Kelloway, 2021). Physical aggression results in severe types of Psychological and emotional repercussions for the victims, besides begetting a culture of distrust as a result of a climate of fear within the crew (Havaei, 2021). Other reported bullying behaviors included constant criticism and mockery based on religious beliefs, creating feelings of exclusion, sending hurtful messages and comments through online groups, and offensive jokes or inappropriate sexual comments, all of which contributed to creating a hostile and unsafe work environment for cadets. Literature labels such types of bullying as destructive as they use an organizational power dynamic and deprive the bullied participant of any control and power (Houghton et al., 2021). A hostile work environment can impact the crew members' productivity and psychological health. This is consistent with research demonstrating that bullying is associated with higher levels of stress, anxiety, and decreased job satisfaction (Cao et al., 2023).

### 3.2. Extent of Bullying Situations Personally Experienced by Cadets Onboard.

Table 2 illustrates the extent of personally experienced bullying situations onboard, showing diverse levels of occurrence in each bullying situation. The overall mean scores reveal that bullying is experienced to a significant level, and this implies that bullying is a chronic workplace problem, especially in hierarchical settings such as ships.

Bullying scenarios personally experienced exhibit notably high levels, with some behaviors categorized as "very high," such as *excessively criticizing a crew member using derogatory*

language and offensively joking or making inappropriate comments of a sexual nature. This supports the assertion that verbal and psychological forms of bullying are prevalent in workplace environments (Abdelaziz & Abu?Snienh, 2022). High instances of bullying may stem from hierarchical structures where power dynamics often allow such behaviors to go unchecked (Wright, 2020).

Table 2: Extent of Bullying Situations Personally Experienced by Cadets Onboard.

| Bullying Situations                                                                                                             | Mean        | Interpretation |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| An officer or rating using their position of authority in physically assaulting a crew member to assert dominance.              | 4.20        | High           |
| Excessively criticizing a crew member through derogatory language, insults, or threats.                                         | 4.45        | Very High      |
| Constantly criticizing and mocking a crew member with a different religious belief makes them feel unwelcome on board.          | 3.43        | High           |
| Sending hurtful messages and comments to a crew member through online groups.                                                   | 3.38        | Moderate       |
| Consistently undermining the perceptions of a crew member, causing them to doubt their judgment.                                | 4.00        | High           |
| A senior officer offering favorable treatment or privileges to a crew member in exchange for sexual favors.                     | 3.83        | High           |
| Offensively joking or making inappropriate comments about a crew member's sexual orientation creating a hostile environment.    | 4.36        | Very High      |
| Excluding a crew member from online groups or conversations, or blocking them from social media, to isolate and ostracize them. | 3.00        | Moderate       |
| Spreading rumors and malicious gossip about a crew member online                                                                | 4.00        | High           |
| Unfairly targeting a crew member for punishment due to their race, gender, or sexual orientation.                               | 3.67        | High           |
| Using rank or position to abuse and belittle a crew member verbally.                                                            | 4.19        | High           |
| Physically attacking a crew member due to their gender identity, culture, or race.                                              | 3.43        | High           |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                                                                             | <b>3.83</b> | <b>High</b>    |

Source: Authors.

Most worrying is the case of sexual *favoritism in exchange for sexual favors*, which shows grave ethical concerns and raises the question of abuse of authority onboard. Such behavior highlights the need for strict policies to address and prevent sexual harassment in the workplace (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020).

Lastly, the research highlights the possible intersectionality of bullying and concerns regarding race, gender, and cultural identity. For instance, discriminatory punishment for such factors and physical violence show that crew members from the minority group may have a disproportionate risk of bullying, underlining the significance of encouraging diversity and inclusivity onboard (Martin et al., 2023).

### 3.3. Impact of Bullying on Well-Being and Work Performance.

Bullying onboard profoundly affects both the personal well-being and work performance of crew members (Li et al., 2022), with most participants reporting a range of adverse consequences. While some individuals demonstrated resilience, others experienced loss of confidence, exclusion and alienation, threat to safety, loss of focus and interest, and being unfairly burdened.

#### 3.3.1. Loss of Confidence.

Verbal Bullying was the most frequently encountered form, with various participants reporting episodes of insulting language, unjustified criticism, and insults directed toward their

personal traits or physical abilities (Kennedy, 2020). Participant 1 reported being verbally attacked by other crew members who “doubted his physical capability based on his body type,” as they perceived his body type limited his work capacity. Participant 9 also stated the prevalence of verbal bullying and how such an incident rendered him “muted” or “withdrawn” at work. Participant 6 also stated that the verbal abuse had caused a “loss of confidence and focus,” which negatively affected his ability to perform duties efficiently. These instances provide evidence of how verbal harassment fosters a culture of disrespect and ridicule, which can significantly erode the confidence of crew members and impact team morale.

#### 3.3.2. Exclusion and Alienation.

Discrimination was felt and was somehow attributed to nationality and perceived capability (Okoro et al., 2020). Participant 4 relayed a case of discrimination based on nationality when he recalled that the Master of their ship displayed “biased assumptions that made him feel demoralized.” Participant 1 experienced discrimination based on physical appearance, as coworkers questioned whether he could perform work tasks because of his size. Some of the participants also reported feeling alienated or isolated following discrimination. Participant 5 indicated that bullying had ruined her professional image and led to unwarranted suspicion by her seniors over her credibility. This caused her to lose confidence and struggle with her supervisors, destroying the trust that is crucial to teamwork and productivity onboard. These experiences of discrimination not only hurt individuals but also create a sense of exclusion and alienation, making team dynamics in a multicultural setting more complicated. Experiences of discrimination and alienation solidify the way bullying can affect not only individual morale (Duran et al., 2021) but also overall crew dynamics. Attitudes of discrimination onboard can undermine the building of mutual respect, which is vital for harmonious and collaborative functioning (Lee et al., 2022).

*“I was discriminated against because of my physical body, because they thought I was too thin to do my job well. They think that I cannot carry heavy objects or equipment during our work.” – Participant 1*

*“My \*\*\*\*\*ian Captain discriminated against me, that being \*\*\*\*\* onboard is no good due to a lack of knowledge.” – Participant 4*

#### 3.3.3. Threat to Safety.

Physical bullying and harassment were reported by some participants, though less frequently than other forms. Participant 10 disclosed that he experienced both physical bullying and harassment, which, while not affecting his performance due to his ability to block out the abuse mentally, posed a serious and direct threat to his sense of safety onboard. Such instances of physical intimidation are particularly concerning in a confined work environment, where crew members have limited options for support or escape, further increasing stress and fear among those targeted (Wunnenberg, 2020).

*“I experienced verbal and physical harassment, which made me feel unsafe. What if something worse happens to me while away from my family?” – Participant 10*

### 3.3.4. Unfairly Burdened.

Favoritism emerged as a form of inequity in task assignments and workload distribution (Shamsudin et al., 2023). Participant 7, for example, recounted experiencing favoritism, noting that he was consistently assigned heavier or more physically demanding tasks than his peers. Despite this treatment’s negative impact, he viewed the experience as an opportunity to build resilience and skills. While some participants adapted positively to this challenge, favoritism can foster resentment and diminish morale, especially if crew members are not treated fairly.

### 3.3.5. Loss of Focus and Interest.

A common issue pointed out by participants was how verbal and physical bullying affected their motivation and focus. Participant 2 revealed that continuous verbal harassment by bosses made them feel “exhausted,” undermining their capability to pay attention to their tasks well. This situation illustrates how sustained verbal harassment can drain an individual’s energy and clarity of thought, ultimately impairing their ability to perform effectively (Singh & Vashisht, 2021). In the same vein, Participant 6 also experienced a “loss of interest at work,” as persistent verbal bullying resulted in a continuous feeling of apprehension, which affected their mental peace and work engagement. This is consistent with studies that connect workplace bullying to higher psychological distress and lower self-esteem, both of which can have a serious impact on job efficacy and job satisfaction (Singh & Vashisht, 2021).

*“It affected my focus on work. I felt exhausted every time our superiors attacked us verbally.” – Participant 2*

*“I lost interest and confidence at work. It became more difficult for me to focus on my duties. There has undoubtedly been a negative impact on my inner peace and performance at work.” – Participant 6*

*“I become muted when I work.” – Participant 9*

Nonetheless, some participants channeled their experiences into challenges that fostered personal growth, self-development, and resilience (Prisniakova et al., 2023). Such reactions reveal an active coping style for bullying, where one utilizes the adverse experience as fuel to perform and prove oneself. Although this resilient response can be self-empowering, it also underscores the need for support structures for individuals who may struggle to manage. The following is an account of how certain cadets transformed a negative experience into an opportunity for improvement.

*“It did not affect my well-being, but I think in terms of my work performance, that verbal abuse serves as my inspiration to do my job better and makes me competent.”- Participant 1*

*“Honestly, I was not affected, and I took it as a positive comment for me to strive more to learn and familiarize the duties and responsibilities onboard.” – Participant 4*

*“This pushed me to develop greater physical and mental strength. I learned to manage my time and energy more effectively, which enhanced my work performance, and this challenge helped me gain valuable skills and experience.” - Participant 7*

*“It did not affect my mental or physical well-being. It is because I never took it deeply. It did not affect my work performance because I already know how to manage those kinds of bullying.” – Participant 10*

The testimony of the participants emphasizes the differential extent to which bullying impinges on well-being and performance. It means lower morale and concentration for some; it is a push factor toward personal development for others. Nevertheless, the net effect is negative, as bullying always reduces the supportive work atmosphere and has an emotional cost on the affected individual (Smith et al., 2020).

### 3.4. Coping Mechanisms of Cadets against Bullying.

Table 3 explains the coping mechanisms cadets use onboard to deal with bullying. According to the data, the highest-scoring strategies include searching for emotional support from others and practicing relaxation, accounting for 56% of the responses. This points to high levels of reliance on personal relationships for emotional coping, arguing with the studies that have indicated that social support has a moderating role in bullying (Eze et al., 2019).

Table 3: Coping Mechanisms of Cadets Against Bullying.

| Strategies                                                                                                                                                              | Frequency Count | Percentage Distribution | Rank |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------|
| Talk to trusted people, whether friends, family members, or teachers, to seek emotional support and guidance.                                                           | 30              | 10.56                   | 1.5  |
| Directly confront and speak out in a calm but assertive manner when bullied.                                                                                            | 17              | 5.99                    | 10   |
| Utilize social media platforms as a medium for reporting and recording bullying incidents.                                                                              | 5               | 1.76                    | 15   |
| Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation to help calm the mind when feeling stress or anxiety from bullying. | 30              | 10.56                   | 1.5  |
| Respond with humor or laugh it off to deflect their negativity and show that their behavior does not faze you.                                                          | 25              | 8.80                    | 4.5  |
| Approach professionals, such as a therapist or counselor, to be provided with additional coping strategies and support.                                                 | 8               | 2.82                    | 14   |
| Establish clear boundaries with the bully and assertively communicate with them.                                                                                        | 18              | 6.34                    | 9    |
| Document bullying incidents, including dates, times, and details of what happened, to seek legal assistance.                                                            | 9               | 3.17                    | 13   |
| Occupy oneself in activities that promote physical and mental well-being, such as exercise and hobbies.                                                                 | 19              | 6.69                    | 8    |
| Ignore the bully and refuse to engage with their taunts or provocations.                                                                                                | 23              | 8.10                    | 6    |
| Share feelings of bullying with people with the same experiences to seek validation and comfort.                                                                        | 12              | 4.23                    | 12   |
| Assert your rights to make it clear that disrespect is not tolerated.                                                                                                   | 14              | 4.93                    | 11   |
| Inform high-ranking personnel to take appropriate action to address the bullying.                                                                                       | 21              | 7.39                    | 7    |
| Engage in positive self-talk to boost self-esteem and build resilience.                                                                                                 | 25              | 8.80                    | 4.5  |
| Focus on positivity to take control of thoughts and reclaim a sense of agency and self-esteem.                                                                          | 28              | 9.86                    | 3    |

Source: Authors.

The “ignore the bully” and “engage productively” strategies elicited 8% and 7% of the responses, respectively. Averting the bully means avoiding confrontation with the negative behavior, which may be a technique of protecting oneself from any

harm caused by observing the bully's behavior. Some evidence suggests that disengagement techniques can mitigate the consequences of bullying by reducing the bully's authority (Falla et al., 2023).

However, some strategies were found to be used less often. For instance, reporting cases of bullying through social media platforms has emerged with low frequency, implying the cadets' reluctance to report matters through digital platforms for several reasons, such as concerns that their report will not be kept confidential, fear of being victimized, or a lack of confidence in the measures taken through digital platforms. Both the writings and surveys prove that the population may avoid turning to other people or authorities to report bullying that is conducted through a social network since they are scared of their privacy and the possible consequences of reporting the abusers (Scarduzio et al., 2020).

In response to bullying onboard, the cadets adopted various coping mechanisms to mitigate its emotional and psychological impacts, demonstrating resilience in the face of challenging situations. Strategies included ranging from relying on faith and spirituality to forming *supportive networks* and *mental reframing*, allowing them to remain stabilized and energized in what others might recognize as a high-stress isolated working condition (Ozcan et al., 2021).

From the qualitative data, faith emerged as a vital source of strength for several participants, who turned to spirituality to stay grounded and cope with isolation. For instance, Participant 1 found comfort through prayer, which they viewed as a stabilizing force when far from family. Drawing on personal faith, they cultivated an inner resilience, underscoring the role of spirituality as a mental support system, especially valuable when physical support systems were unavailable.

*"If you could think broadly, there is much to do to eliminate or lessen your worries when you encounter bullying. One of these is to pray because, for me, prayers are powerful. I always seek God's guidance to strengthen me since I have only myself on board. My family is far away from me, and I am too old to handle such things."* – Participant 1

*"By turning a negative experience into a positive one. Thinking that it is just a challenge that I need to overcome. By persevering and also praying."* – Participant 2

*"I did not take it negatively because if you let yourself be affected by their comments, you cannot perform your duties. Also, communicating with your family is a big help because it motivates you more to work hard and to learn more about the duties and responsibilities onboard."* – Participant 4

Social support from trusted colleagues was also essential for some who leaned on friendships to counter feelings of isolation and alienation. Participant 8 emphasized the importance of surrounding oneself with positive influences and having a trusted person on board. Such comforting relationships provided a sense of emotional security and fostered friendship, enabling participants to counteract the divisive impact of bullying.

Similarly, Participant 6 was comforted by trusted friends, showing that even in a small space, as Sekar and Fauzia (2023) noted, social bonds can provide consolation and mitigate the negative impact of bullying.

*"Surround yourself with positivity, always talk to someone you trust, and share your thoughts."* – Participant 8

*"To eradicate these aspects, we should approach and seek assistance from our senior officers and make a report. No seafarers should be bullied onboard ships."* – Participant 6

Goal orientation and professionalism were also among the strategies employed by the participants. Seafarers highlighted their commitment to work and reasons for being on board, such as supporting their families. By maintaining a purpose focused on career and personal aspirations, they can maintain their focus on their goals, thereby reducing the impact of bullying on their sense of self and job satisfaction.

*"It made me realize that there will be these unpleasant realities onboard, and at the same time, I also learned to focus on my personal growth and let these experiences become a learning experience."* – Participant 3

*"I showed them I was on board because I was there to work and earn for my family, not to be involved with my crewmates. I just let them think whatever they wanted to think. Anyway, people always have something to say. I did not care about them and kept my focus on my mission."* – Participant 5

*"Onboard, I faced favoritism, with some cadets getting easier tasks while I was given heavier ones. I chose to see it in a positive light and viewed the heavy work as an opportunity to improve my skills and stamina. I recorded my work and inquired of my supervisor how I could do better, and through this, I demonstrated my dedication and ability to work on complex tasks, through which I built good working relationships with my colleagues and mentors, and transformed the experience into an opportunity for improvement and growth."* – Participant 7

*"I showed them that I was not affected and always looked at the bright side of the experience."* – Participant 9

*"There is nothing to overcome because I did not take it personally, I just let it in and out of my mind because thinking about it will not help me with my work."* – Participant 10

These diverse coping mechanisms—professionalism, social support, and religion—emphasized how the participants could cope with the adversity of bullying onboard. These mechanisms enabled them to be resilient, such that bullying in the maritime work setting did not compromise their well-being or quality of work.

## Conclusions.

This study points out the pervasive practice of bullying experienced by maritime cadets, with a high prevalence of verbal, discriminatory, and physical bullying behavior onboard ships. Cadets would typically respond to such acts by offering emotional support to one another within peer groups and practicing relaxation techniques, drawing on their strength in trying situations. Nevertheless, the emphasis on personal coping mechanisms suggests an imperative for the presence of a strong organizational support structure because awareness and training programs would not be in a position to address the deeply rooted practice of bullying in the maritime sector.

This research recommends strengthening anti-bullying policies and implementing compulsory training sessions to promote a healthier and more respectful maritime work culture. These training sessions should sensitize and prepare cadets and senior crew members with the tools to recognize, handle, and prevent bullying. Prioritizing a culture of respect, responsibility, and concern, the shipping sector can prevent the negative consequences of bullying and ensure the well-being and dignity of all seafarers, resulting in a better and more effective shipboard experience.

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