

Strategy to Strengthen the Resilience of Migrant Boat Crews in Taiwan

Nur Cholik Widyan Saputra^{1*}, Margaretha Hanita², Stanislaus Riyanta³

Universitas Indonesia Depok, Indonesia

Email: nurcholik.ws@gmail.com^{1*}, margarethahanita@yahoo.com²,
stanislausriyanta@gmail.com³

*Correspondence

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Crew, Migrant Workers, Resilience, Stress. This study aims to understand the resilience strategies of migrant crew on Taiwanese fishing vessels in the face of stress and pressure at work. Using a qualitative approach, this study involved in-depth interviews with seven resource persons who were migrant fishermen in Taiwan. The snowball sampling technique was used to select interviewees who had previously worked on Taiwanese fishing vessels. Data collection was conducted through interviews to gain comprehensive insights into the experiences and resilience strategies of migrant fishermen. The results showed that migrant fishermen are exposed to various sources of stress and pressure in the workplace, including hazardous working conditions, distance from family and home, work pressure, and poor accommodation conditions. However, the study also revealed that migrant fishermen use a variety of resilience strategies to overcome these challenges, including social support from colleagues, independence in solving problems, improved adaptation skills, and finding sources of strength from personal beliefs and values. By deepening the understanding of migrant fishermen's resilience strategies on Taiwanese fishing vessels, the research is expected to provide valuable insights for developing policies and intervention programs to improve the welfare and safety of migrant fishermen in risky work environments. In addition, the findings of this study can also be a foundation for further research in understanding the dynamics and determinants of individual resilience in high-risk occupational sectors.



Introduction

International labor migration has become one of the increasingly popular strategies to increase incomes for families in low- and middle-income countries, including Indonesia (Reid, Kynn, Smith-Darden, & McCauley, 2023). More than 9 million Indonesians work abroad, equivalent to nearly 7% of Indonesia's total labor force (Aburn, Gott, & Hoare, 2016). In East Asia, only China and the Philippines have more international migrant workers than Indonesia. The types of work carried out by

international migrant workers from Indonesia also vary significantly from work on land (land-based) to sea-based (sea-based), such as being domestic assistants, babysitters, agricultural workers, construction workers, factory workers, elderly caregivers, shop/restaurant/hotel workers, drivers, and also being seafarers on commercial ships and fishing vessels (Indonesia, 2017).

Indonesia is the third largest country in the world, after China and the Philippines, which supplies seafarers on foreign vessels, both fishing vessels and commercial vessels. The Ministry of Transportation lists 1.2 million Indonesian seafarers (Ciaramella, Monacelli, & Cocimano, 2022). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs recorded more than 250,000 PMI Fishery Seafarers on foreign fishing vessels during 2013-2015, with the highest placement being Taiwan-flagged vessels (217,655 people) and South Korea (31,792 people).

Based on research conducted by the Indonesia Ocean Justice Initiative, there is a high interest in becoming fishery seafarers working on foreign ships due to the unavailability of domestic jobs that absorb labor and the uncertain income from working on local Indonesian ships. Meanwhile, working on foreign fishing vessels provides a more stable income with a higher salary than working domestically (Zautra, Arewasikporn, & Davis, 2010).

Taiwanese fishing boats have long been a popular destination for migrant crew members from various countries, including Indonesia. As an integral part of the global fishing industry, migrant fishermen on Taiwanese fishing vessels play an important role in meeting the demand for marine catches in the international market (Doyle et al., 2016). However, despite their significant contribution, migrant fishermen face various workplace challenges and risks, which can affect their well-being and health (Wu et al., 2013).

Working as a migrant fisherman on a Taiwanese fishing boat requires solid physical skills and high mental and emotional endurance. These fishermen are often faced with dangerous working conditions, far from access to adequate health services, and are vulnerable to exploitation and human rights violations (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda, 2014). In this context, it is essential to understand the individual resilience strategies that migrant fishermen can use to deal with the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis on fishing boats.

The welfare and safety issues of migrant fishermen on Taiwanese fishing vessels have become an increasing concern in recent years (Board, 2023). Hazardous working conditions, social isolation, work pressure, and poor accommodation conditions are some of the factors that often cause stress and stress for migrant fishermen. Differences in culture, language, and work rules between migrant fishermen and boat management complicate this challenge (Janssen, Jensen, Harth, & Oldenburg, 2024).

Although the government's role in protecting migrant fishermen on Taiwanese fishing vessels has been widely discussed and researched, this research focuses on aspects of government policies and regulations. Therefore, there is an urgent need to dig deeper

into the individual resilience strategies used by migrant fishermen to safeguard their safety and well-being amid risky working conditions.

The research will focus attention on individual resilience strategies used by migrant fishermen on Taiwanese fishing vessels. By emphasizing the importance of ABK's active role in safeguarding their safety and well-being, this research will open up space for discussion on how ABK can take proactive measures to protect themselves from risks and hazards in the workplace. Thus, this research is expected to provide valuable insights for developing training and education programs aimed at improving the resilience of individual migrant fishermen on Taiwanese fishing vessels.

This study aimed to understand the resilience strategies of migrant fishermen on Taiwanese fishing boats in the face of stress and pressure in the workplace. Utilizing a qualitative approach, it aimed to explore the experiences and perspectives of migrant fishermen and the resilience strategies they use to overcome the challenges they face.

Method

Qualitative research methods will be used to collect data relevant to the study. This approach allows researchers to understand the experiences and perspectives of migrant fishermen on Taiwanese fishing vessels related to their resilience strategies. This research will involve in-depth interviews with nine interviewees who are migrant fishermen on Taiwanese fishing boats. The selection of resource persons is carried out using the snowball sampling technique, which allows researchers to identify potential sources through the social networks of sources involved in the research. The selected resource persons are fishermen who have previous experience as migrant fishermen on Taiwanese fishing boats, prioritizing those who are handling passports for the second, third, or onward departure. The snowball sampling technique is carried out by asking for recommendations from resource persons to participants involved in the research, thus allowing the identification of additional sources with relevant experience and insight.

Data will be collected through individual interviews with each interviewee and conducted with structured interview guidance to ensure data consistency and completeness. Data collection will be carried out by considering the principles of research ethics, including confidentiality and security of information submitted by resource persons. Data analysis will be done descriptively by examining patterns of findings that emerge from interviews. The data will be coded to identify key themes, patterns, and relationships between various concepts emerging from the data. Descriptive analysis and coding will enable researchers to explain and understand migrant fishermen's resilience strategies in more detail.

Results and Discussion

Social Demographics of Resource Persons

This study interviewed seven interviewees who worked as fishermen on Taiwanese fishing boats. All interviewees were men. The age of the interviewees varied from 24 –

42 years. The average age of the interviewees was 32 years. My experience working as a fisherman in Taiwan varies from 2 years to 11 years. The types of boats used by the resource persons also varied, namely squid boats (1 person), layur boats (1 person), badong boats (2 people), trawl boats (1 person), and fishing boats (2 people). Most interviewees were married (6 people), and the rest (1 person) were unmarried.

Table 1
Demographic Data of Resource Persons

No	Initial Name	Age	Asal	I spent a long time in Taiwan	Types of Fishing Vessels
1	IS	42	Gebang	11 Years	Trawl Boat
2	JN	40	Cirebon	5 Years	Ship (Kepiting) Badong
3	TS	33	Pemalang	2 Years	Fishing Boat
4	AG	35	Tegal	6 Years	Ship (Kepiting) Badong
5	GN	27	Cirebon	6 Years	Fishing Boat
6	TO	24	Cilacap	2 Years	Kapal Layur
7	SK	29	Indramayu	5 Years	Squid Ship

Work-Related Stress

Stress associated with working conditions poses a significant challenge for migrant fishermen on Taiwanese fishing boats. In the early stages of their arrival, a lack of understanding of the Taiwanese language was often a significant obstacle in communicating with the ship's captain and other crew members. This difficulty can lead to misunderstandings, often leading to conflict situations, where ship captains can scold or criticize migrant crew. The language barrier not only affects the quality of work of fishermen but can also affect their mental well-being.

In addition to language problems, migrant fishermen face difficulties adjusting to the rhythm of work on board. Adapting to a new work environment and learning to operate ship tools and engines is a serious challenge. At first, the crew may not be skilled in carrying out their duties smoothly, so they are often scolded or criticized by the ship's captain. This lack of ability can increase their stress and pressure levels at work. One of the interviewees with the initials AG shared his experience. "It is sad that if the employer is chatty, it is the saddest. I have been to Taiwan before; the first was in 2010. In 2010, yes, it was difficult the first time I went to Taiwan; I did not understand the language, I could not work, the employer was fussy, yes greens line if Javanese people said it was genes line."

Also, migrant fishermen often feel pressured by ship captains and companies' high expectations and standards. They feel burdened to always do a good job and meet their superiors' expectations. Harsh criticism and high evaluation from ship captains can increase the stress and anxiety levels of the migrant crew, resulting in more significant pressure to carry out their duties.

Stress Related to Family

The stress caused by the distance separating migrant fishermen from their families is one of the significant factors in their work experience on Taiwanese fishing boats. Long distances from family can trigger a variety of emotional and psychological reactions that impact the mental and physical well-being of migrant fishermen. The discussion about the causes of stress can be seen from several aspects, including the longing, worry, and sadness experienced by migrant fishermen.

Disaster-Related Stress

Extreme conditions at sea, such as bad weather, heavy rain, strong winds, and high waves, can cause significant stress for the migrant crew. When faced with hostile weather conditions like this, crews often experience high pressure and face situations that have the potential to endanger their safety. This extreme weather affects not only their comfort and physical well-being but also their mental and emotional well-being.

One of the leading causes of stress during bad weather conditions is the uncertainty and sense of uncontrollability experienced by the crew. When bad weather hits, the situation on the ship becomes unpredictable and difficult to foresee. Crew members may feel they have no control over the situation and fear for their safety. This uncertainty can increase their stress levels, resulting in ongoing anxiety and tension.

In addition to uncertainty, physical discomfort is a significant factor causing stress for migrant fishermen during lousy weather. Heavy rain, strong winds, and high waves can make boarding conditions difficult and uncomfortable. The crew may feel uncomfortable or sick from strong boat vibrations and movements and exposure to extreme weather conditions. This discomfort can interfere with their physical well-being and increase overall anxiety and stress levels.

In addition, bad weather situations can also worsen working conditions and increase the risk of accidents on ships. Strong winds and high waves can make work on a ship more difficult and dangerous, with a significantly increased risk of slipping or falling. This can increase ABK's stress and anxiety levels and affect their work performance.

Bad weather can also affect the quality of rest and sleep of migrant crew on board. Strong vibrations and movements of ships, along with the sounds of wind and waves, can disrupt their sleep and cause severe sleep disturbances. These sleep disorders can lead to prolonged fatigue, which in turn can increase their stress and anxiety levels.

Stress Related to Departure Procedures

Based on interviews with interviewees, information was obtained that there are two types of work on Taiwanese fishing vessels based on the validity of departure procedures: official (legal) and unofficial (illegal) procedures. Migrant fishermen usually refer to those who work through official procedures as Local Crew / Local Job / Local Vessel, while those who work through unofficial procedures as LG Crew / LG Job / LG Ships. ABK-Local, usually also called ABK-Official, are those who work in Taiwan by following official procedures; their salaries are paid with NTD, have an ARC and Askes. Local ABK placement is regulated in the P to P scheme (between PT in Indonesia and Taiwan Agency). While LG crew are crew who work non-procedurally using a letter of guarantee, sail in international waters on Taiwan-flagged ships, generally depart using a

visit visa, are not registered with the Ministry of Manpower, BP2M1, KDEI in Taipei or the Taiwan government, low salaries, vulnerable to exploitation. There is no guarantee of workers' rights. LG's crew placement procedures do not follow Indonesian regulations regarding the placement and protection of migrant workers abroad. Their placement is only from an employment contract and is usually only signed by crew and ship owners without the endorsement of the Indonesian Representative.

Strategy to Strengthen the Resilience of Migrant Crew

Based on the results of interviews, it was found that migrant fishermen develop resilience-building strategies to face challenges in the workplace. First, they emphasize the importance of improving the ability of individual characters to be more resilient in the face of pressure. This includes the development of mental and physical strength, increased optimism, firm conviction, patience, and sincerity in work. Thus, migrant fishermen can be better prepared to face difficult situations and remain steadfast in their duties.

Furthermore, migrant fishermen strengthen their resilience from the beginning of the departure process by choosing official channels. They recognize that official channels can provide protection for their rights as migrant workers, as well as minimize the risk of engaging in illegal or unsafe practices. By choosing the official route, migrant fishermen can be more confident and protected when working on Taiwanese fishing boats. The resource person with the initials AD, a 24-year-old migrant crew in Taiwan for two years, explained that official fishermen do not need to be afraid if they encounter problems because many parties can protect them. "If we are not illegal, we are an official crew, so we are afraid that if we want to go to Taiwan, the important thing is to go to the official legal Taiwan. If it is illegal, if it is okay, an accident, or if the employer plays hands, no one will help. However, if we are official, then someone helps. Do not be afraid. The important thing is right work."

Finally, resilience-strengthening strategies involve actively joining communities or groups in Taiwan. By joining the community, migrant fishermen can provide mutual support, share experiences, and get helpful information about working conditions and their rights as migrant workers. This helps them feel more connected and supported when living abroad. TS, 33 years old, a resource person from Pematang who has been in Taiwan for two years, explained the role of the community in helping migrant fishermen. "In Taiwan, there are groups from their respective cities. If they are the organizers, if they are the Tegal Groups, if there are work accidents or accidents, they must be taken care of, and it is safe."

The same thing was also conveyed by GN, a 27-year-old resource person from Cirebon who has been working in Taiwan for six years. "If there are bosses who play hands, do not be afraid; in Taiwan, there are many shelters to protect PMI PMI who are miserable or get bad treatment from their bosses. Do not be afraid; we are also the union of any regional community to help, especially if we join an organization that is one district or one region. We share and do not make unilateral decisions. So the employer plays hands, and we keep hitting back; it cannot be so. If there is a boss who plays hands, avoid it. If you can go back to the office, you go back to the office; you do not need to extend

it. All we have to do is investigate if video evidence shows the boss playing hands. We can prosecute the boss; we can get a fine."

Conclusion

This research has revealed the importance of resilience-strengthening strategies for migrant fishermen on Taiwanese vessels in the face of various stressors. It found that there are four main stressors faced by migrant fishermen: work-related stress, separation from family, disasters at sea, and departure procedures. These conditions can result in significant mental and emotional distress for migrant fishermen. However, the study also identified several resilience-strengthening strategies migrant fishermen use to cope with such stress.

First, research shows that improving individual character abilities is a critical factor in increasing the resilience of migrant fishermen. By developing mentally and physically strong character, as well as an attitude of optimism, confidence, patience, and sincerity in work, migrant fishermen can deal with pressure and stress more effectively.

Second, improving the Taiwanese language and sailing skills strengthens resilience. By strengthening communication and work skills on board, migrant crew members can increase their independence and productivity, thereby reducing the level of stress they experience.

Third, the selection of official channels as a resilience-building strategy has also proven effective in protecting the rights of migrant fishermen. By choosing the official route, migrant fishermen can avoid various risks and threats associated with unofficial channels, increasing their sense of security and confidence in carrying out work on board.

Finally, joining a community or community in Taiwan is also an effective resilience-strengthening strategy for migrant fishermen. Through interaction and support from fellow migrant fishermen, they can share experiences, gain helpful information, and provide emotional and social support to each other, thereby reducing the isolation and psychological distress they feel.

Overall, the study shows that resilience-building strategies are important in helping migrant fishermen deal with various stressors on Taiwanese vessels. By strengthening individual character, improving skills and abilities, choosing official channels, and joining communities, migrant fishermen can improve their quality of life and well-being at work and reduce the level of stress and distress they experience.

Bibliography

- Auburn, Gemma, Gott, Merryn, & Hoare, Karen. (2016). What is resilience? An integrative review of the empirical literature. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(5), 980–1000.
- Board, Natalie. (2023). *A Comparison of Emotional Intelligence and Resilience Between Bachelor's Degree and Associate Degree Nursing Students*. University of South Dakota.
- Ciaramella, Maria, Monacelli, Nadia, & Cocimano, Livia Concetta Eugenia. (2022). Promotion of resilience in migrants: A systematic review of study and psychosocial intervention. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 24(5), 1328–1344.
- Doyle, Niamh, MacLachlan, Malcolm, Fraser, Alistair, Stilz, Ralf, Lismont, Karlien, Cox, Henriette, & McVeigh, Joanne. (2016). Resilience and well-being amongst seafarers: a cross-sectional study of crew across 51 ships. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 89, 199–209.
- Indonesia, Bank Dunia. (2017). *Pekerja Global Indonesia, antara peluang dan resiko*. World Bank Group.
- Janssen, Wiebke, Jensen, Hans Joachim, Harth, Volker, & Oldenburg, Marcus. (2024). Systematic Review: Measurement Methods and Concept of Resilience Among Seafarers. *INQUIRY: The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, 61, 00469580231221288.
- Reid, Taylor A., Kynn, Jax, Smith-Darden, Joanne P., & McCauley, Heather L. (2023). Resilience in the context of sexual violence: A scoping review. *Journal of Family Violence*, 1–17.
- Southwick, Steven M., Bonanno, George A., Masten, Ann S., Panter-Brick, Catherine, & Yehuda, Rachel. (2014). Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 5(1), 25338.
- Wu, Gang, Feder, Adriana, Cohen, Hagit, Kim, Joanna J., Calderon, Solara, Charney, Dennis S., & Mathé, Aleksander A. (2013). Understanding resilience. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, 7, 10.
- Zautra, Alex J., Arewasikporn, Anne, & Davis, Mary C. (2010). Resilience: Promoting well-being through recovery, sustainability, and growth. *Research in Human Development*, 7(3), 221–238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15427609.2010.504431>