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## **The Femmar project : clarifying the role of women in awareness and compliance with hygiene and safety in the fisheries sector in France<sup>1</sup>.**

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The FEMMAR project is about the changing role and status of women in maritime activities. This project is led by researchers at the University of Nantes (jurists, sociologists, géographes, economists), as well as researchers from the Universities of Spanish Basque Country, La Coruna and Greenwich. Over a period of 3 years (2009-2011), it aims to analyze and highlight the changing role and status of women in maritime activities. For this, this project proposes to address the status and role of women on land and on board as soon as they have an activity related to maritime operations. Indeed, over the last twenty years, the condition and role of women within the maritime world has considerably changed, generating an important but insufficiently implemented legal evolution, owing, most likely, to the still marginal place granted to maritime activities, but also to the weight of socio-cultural traditions.

For the purpose of exploring these questions, this project proposes an investigation of the condition and role of women not only as seafarers, but also in their terrestrial roles insofar as their activity is linked to the maritime sector. This study will be structured around four groups of questions:

- working conditions
- professional training
- social status
- social connections and territorial arrangements

This research program was born out of many discussions with women involved in different activities of the maritime sector. During these discussions, all our interlocutors, whatever the nature of their activity, have noted how their role was misunderstood and even sometimes overlooked even though they have been in recent years causing major advances (obtaining a status for wives of fishermen or fishfarmers working in the activity of their husband; access to jobs previously reserved for men in the Merchant Navy; involvement in port reception facilities; involvement in professional organizations or in local governments).

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<sup>1</sup> Ce texte est issu d'une communication réalisée dans le cadre du colloque : It's not just about the fish, Social and cultural perspectives of sustainable Marine fisheries, 4-5 april, School of Sciences and the Greenwich Maritime Institute, University of Greenwich, 2011.

All of these women highlighted the need for an inventory, to see how could be taken into account their concerns but also to see how could be improved their integration within the various activities of the maritime sector while taking into account the imperatives of territorial development in coastal areas.

Given these expectations common to different business segments of the maritime sector, the program FEMMAR is built into the logic of understanding a major social phenomenon in order to demonstrate the interactions between the arrival of women in maritime activities and the evolution of the legal standard but also how the evolution of the legal standards, themselves, has also allowed this feminization of maritime activities. Designed as a genuinely participatory process based on a common exchange, it also aims to achieve results appropriated by women and usable by policy makers.

The integration of civil society within the university research is a cornerstone of this research action. The aim of the researchers (economists, lawyers, geographers, sociologists) is simply to give voice to these women. So, it was chosen as a first step to conduct a quantitative study by distributing a questionnaire to all women actors in the various maritime activities. This survey was intended to nurture a reflection on the specific constraints which these women face and ways to remedy them. It was also conceived as a way to communicate about this project and to allow the women involved in maritime activities to recognize themselves in this study and appropriate it.

The methodology for distributing the questionnaire was the following:

- posted on the site femmar: [femmar.free.fr](http://femmar.free.fr)
- sending paper questionnaires
- distributing the questionnaire in the field
- sending the questionnaire by mail (internet sites, local and regional media (newspapers and radios)
- use of women's associations, associations of merchant navy officers, unions, , shipping, maritime schools and colleges, maritime chaplains, the professional organization of fisheries, social workers, Seafarers doctors, shipping companies (freight and passenger transport), Missions from the sea, Administration of Maritime Affairs, Navy, management centers and accounting firms.
- translation of the questionnaire in English and Spanish posted on the site

A target return of 500 questionnaires was set for a final return of 448 questionnaires on the 31 January 2010, which allowed the project to enter the second phase with the start of interviews in early January 2010. 44 interviews were conducted in 2010 (35 made in France, 5 in Britain and 4 in Spain). They were mostly filmed in order to make a film of testimonies, with a dual approach of restitution and understanding of a new social phenomenon. A focus group was also conducted in November 2010.

After analyzing these questionnaires and interviews, we can now say that this project demonstrates that the presence of women in maritime activities is now a commonplace and their skills as sailors are recognized, demonstrating an important development in the maritime sector, which despite a centuries-old repository of masculinity, quickly accepted the arrival of women. However, we saw a real particularity regarding the marine fisheries sector that concerns the collective investment of women (women of fisher-fishermen or women). In fact, women really create a group dynamic at sea or on land through the sensitization of men about the importance of compliance with hygiene and safety in the workplace (1). They are a vector

of critical awareness with regard to the denunciation of the multiplication of addictive behaviors (2). But they also carry considerable work in the widespread use of medico-psychological emergency units following maritime incidents involving fishing vessels (3).

### *1. Encouraging the compliance with the rules of hygiene and safety*

Indeed, despite the progress made regarding the safety of the ship as a float in all maritime activities, the difficulty of work and living conditions and working at sea mean that marine fisheries are still today one of the professional activities among the most dangerous with a high rate of occupational accidents and occupational diseases (ILO, Safety and Health in the Fishing Industry, Geneva, 1999, p.19). This explains why the theme of safety has long been invested by women's associations in marine fisheries, especially on the Atlantic coast.

In 2008, 3203 maritime accidents have been recorded in France (against 3400 in 2007), 1497 in the fisherie sector (against 1682 in 2007) and 1208 in the Merchant Shipping (against 1280 in 2007). During that year, 25 deaths at sea due to shipwreck and falls at sea were also recorded, especially in fishing and to a lesser extent, shellfish farming. However, the French legislation places the burden on the employer's safety obligation. In accordance with the Framework Directive 89/391 of 12 March 1989, Law No. 97-1051 of 18 November 1997 extended to businesses of shipping the provisions of the Labour Code relating to the general obligation of prevention (C. trav., art. L. 742-5 old).

Turning specifically to the marine fisheries sector, Directive 93/103 of 23 November 1993 concerning the minimum safety and health at work on board fishing vessels (OJ L 307.13 in December 1993, p 1) organizes a share of tasks between the shipowner, the captain and the crew. If the owner must take the necessary measures to ensure the safety and health of seamen by ensuring ship maintenance and proper functioning of rescue, the captain should receive extensive training in the prevention of diseases and accidents, maintenance of the ship's stability and navigation. As for the crew, he must also receive training specifically aimed at fighting against accidents. The law also prescribes the wearing of equipment such as clothes with integrated buoyancy (Article 9 of Decree No. 2007-1227 of 21 August 2007 on the prevention of occupational hazards and maritime welfare of seafarers at sea and in the ports). Its non-compliance involves a contravention of 1500 € fine (Article 11 of Decree). Despite a steady decline, accidents at work are still more at sea than on land.

This large number of serious or fatal accidents is often explained by the existence of a culture of risk inherent in the profession of fisherman and in fact, this ancient culture has led women and women's associations to initiate a change of mentality. These figures explain the involvement of women's associations of fishermen in raising awareness of safety rules. One of them is the Association of Women and Families of Sailors Vendée (AFFMV). This association has notably led a campaign for the wearing of clothes with integrated buoyancy to limit the risk of drowning.

The commitment of women sailors, however, is not homogeneous in the French territory. Women sailors in the Mediterranean are not really safety conscious. The concentration of maritime incidents in Atlantic probably explains a greater involvement of women and associations in Western France (The region of Brittany with 32% of maritime jobs amounted, has in fact, 41% of the maritime accidents in 2008).

The FEMMAR's project results show that promoting standards of safety is often worn by women and is also better received from them, not only because they address safety with a different vision than men but also because they adopt a more conciliatory approach. In interviews, women's influence has been demonstrated. Both sailors' wives encourage their husband not to go at sea when the weather is bad (thus ending the social obligation of

imitating those who go at sea when bad weather) and authorities have improved the monitoring of safety on board. Women speech, or more broadly the women discourse is therefore a vector of conciliation of socio-professional relationships. Some interviews reveal an educational dimension in the women speech: *"it is often said that fishermen do not like women. But during my internship I had the opportunity to control their fishing vessels or fishing and every time it went well. Controllers have noticed that when a woman is on board, even if it is a woman who just controls them, they are much more relaxed. Yet the fishermen are increasingly resistant to maritime affairs. Because the controls are strengthened. And they told me that. Instead of doing the big macho men, they are just lovely"* (interview No. 4). The educational dimension is effectively illustrated by the progress made in recent years, for example regarding the wearing of safety equipment. It also reveals a particular attention to another concern specific to women in maritime communities.

The survey reveals that 81% of women in the maritime sector consider safety in their business satisfactorily with 73% in fishing, 87% in shellfish, 88% in Shipping, 92% in the Navy. It is the same for 80% of the women seafarers.

However, although the situation has improved, a lot remains to be done. Risk-taking too often takes precedence over respect for safety rules. *"After a shipwreck, sailors are committed to invest more in safety, but after a while, they resume their business as before"* (Interview No. 1). The sailors do not wait to go back at sea when the storms last for too long. Therefore, the involvement of women sailors is not sufficient to reverse the denial of danger and a culture of risk is still deeply rooted among the sailors. Although they are aware of the risks they take, they prefer not to think about them (and therefore do not protect themselves) otherwise they would not go at sea anymore.

A sailor's wife, member of an association said: *"normally wearing a clothe with integrated buoyancy is obligatory but my husband does not wear it. It is especially for people who are exposed. He is in his cabin. Often there are meetings in which tests are offered. But nobody comes. Even the bosses."* Only 20% of the sailors would wear the clothes with integrated buoyancy. On board, at least in fishing and coasting, it appears that men exert a pressure against those who would wear the PFD. At least two excuses are put forward and proved in practice deterrents: clothes with integrated buoyancy call into question the virility of men and this can be interpreted as a mark of defiance against the captain.

Therefore, women and women's associations action in this field allows a change in attitudes and practices. This change is still at a beginning but it is irreversible because, thanks to the efforts of education by women, new generations of fishermen are now aware of the compliance with the rules of hygiene and safety. Because they have taken the issue of security of their husbands on board ship to heart, women and the associations representing them have contributed to changing the legal framework of respect for the generations to come. It is certain that without their efforts such advances could not be reached so quickly.

## ***2. Fighting against addictive practices (alcohol and drugs)***

Sailors have always had the reputation of being heavy consumers of alcohol and tobacco. The fight against addictive practices has grown in recent years, through awareness raising but also by the establishment of means of control and a safety obligation imposed on the employer. Since 2007, the "ENIM" (institution of social security for seafarers) and the Maritime Institute of Prevention (IMP) reinforce prevention among sailors, with the support of some local fishing committees, such as Lorient who participated in the distribution of a booklet to raise awareness in maritime schools. The fight against addictive practices is made difficult however by the fact that alcoholism is still a taboo subject, "for fear of dismissal or fear of stigmatizing the profession". Christine Latimier, addictologists in Lorient indicates

that consumption of alcohol and drugs often takes place the weekend in ports : "*Returning to the port is often a difficult time. The trouble lies in wait. The sailor then seeks a psychostimulant to find the excitement he had at sea.*"

A study conducted by doctors of seafarers on addictive practices of merchant navy, fishing and navy highlights a high consumption of addictive products (tobacco, alcohol, drugs) higher compared to the general population.

According to the Health Barometer 2005, 29.9% of French say they are smokers and the survey shows that over 44% of sailors are smokers. It has also noticed increased alcohol consumption on board ships, attributed to the deteriorating economic situation. The consumption of alcohol among seamen is also higher than the general population (18.9% against 9.7%) but this is only true for the fishing industry. And sailors addicted to alcohol are also addicted to tobacco, more than on land (16.2% against 6.30% in the general population). As for cannabis, 36% of French said they had experienced it against 46% of seafarers. Addiction to nicotine is also much higher in the fishery sector (with approximately 75% of smokers) than in the two other marines with 55% of smokers.

Daily consumption of alcohol is higher in fishing (16.6%) than in the Merchant Navy (7.3%) and nationally (6.2%). Daily consumption of alcohol at risk according to WHO is also more important in fishing (18.6%) but also in Navy (14.4%) and Shipping (8%). Repeated drunkenness is much higher in fishing (26.6%) than in other sectors even if they concern respectively 16.8% and 11.6% of merchant marine sailors and nationally. However, fishermen and commercial have the same alcohol dependence (15.5%) higher than in the Navy (13.1%).

The FEMMAR survey results reveal yet a real gap between these figures and the perception by women of the presence of addictive practices in the maritime sectors and especially fishing. Across the maritime sector, 60% of women said that there is no addictive behavior in their business but the results are very different across sectors. While fishing is a sector where the consumption of tobacco and alcohol is still important, the women of the fishing and shellfish farming are those who say the most that their business is not affected by addictive practices (84% and 83%). Identical proportions can also be found in Spain, with 43 shellfish pickers on 47 who say that there is no problem of addiction.

These figures are however in contradiction with the interviews and speeches from women's groups. A woman skipper also states "*the addictive products, there are still a lot on board*" (Interview No. 23). These results can not be explained by a misunderstanding of addictive practices, but rather as a reaction to reverse the negative image of the sector in this area (Indeed, 77% of women feel that the fishing industry suffers from a bad image).

It is the same regarding the fight against addictive practices. 70% of women in the maritime sector consider it is quite high or satisfactory. Women are satisfied with 77% in fishing, 88% in shellfish farming. It is the same in Spain with 25 shellfish pickers on 33 who believe that the fight against addictive practices is satisfactory or very satisfactory. These results are surprising, especially because the fight against addictive practices is one area associations of women sailors have worked on. Some associations have distributed booklets to inform fishermen of the dangers of addictive practices but also to teach them how to discern the symptoms of addiction at one of their colleagues. This work has helped the diffusion of information and risen the awareness of the public and the administration of maritime affairs concerning the multiplication of addictive behavior on board fishing vessels.

But the results of the Femmar project show here that this does not mean that fishermen feel free to speak about it. If women have raised awareness among public authorities of the existence of a phenomenon that threatens to become endemic on board fishing vessels, there is still much to do within their own family for that matter ceases to be a taboo.

### ***3- Organising the counseling following maritime incidents***

The interviews revealed a strong involvement of some fishermen wives' associations in favor of a better counseling of families following a maritime incident, as illustrated by the following excerpt from an interview conducted with a skipper's wife in Noirmoutier, a member of the association of women and families of sailors from Vendée: *"The counseling... we push for it to be offered to families at the outset. And then that it is reoffered as well after. Because sometimes at the beginning, the families they didn't want to ... but maybe sometimes after 6 months ... .. if it was proposed again ... it would perhaps be in place. It's a little hard to establish it but I think it's on track"* (interview No. 14).

This association and the Maritime Social Service have indeed found that the direct and indirect victims (families, friends and maritime community) of sea events need a follow-up counseling. Sea events are indeed responsible for the appearance of abnormal behaviors. Since the high number of shipwrecks in Vendee in the 2000s, fishermen were afraid to return to sea and there is an increase of the number of accidents.

In addition, a few months or even years after the event at sea, the victims showed signs of trauma (sleep and appetite ...). But the victims do not make the connexion between the cause and the effect as shown in the following excerpt: *" shipwreck. He was safe. And some months later I saw his wife... She told me "my 10 year old daughter is at the leisure center but there is a problem because of a trip at sea and I have to go to get her back. They were leaving and everything goes well but after a while the girl she had an attack of tetany. And she said "at least she is not a good sailor, it is not like his father. " So I immediately reacted. And then I said" but not, your daughter is not well, she is traumatized to go to sea. .. I called people from Rainbow (Welcome Center therapy) and asked them to see her. And the girl was not well at all: his father had returned to sea and she was very worried every time he did not return. The girl had not said anything. Does the doctor have done this connection there? It is also to challenge. And say yeah your daughter is not going very well. His dad was involved and he was saved. They have nothing to complain about anything, even women, children, say "me I can not complain, although I'm not well". Well they can have a trauma. And this injury should not trivialize it, otherwise it will become catastrophic. Saying "I have nothing to complain about ". But, of course you are entitled to complain. When your husband returned to sea it will not go well. It is not possible. These people ignore that they are not going well. They have actually suffered an injury and they are entitled to say it and get some help. "* (Interview No. 1).

Fishermen tend to minimize the danger of maritime incidents in order to protect themselves (otherwise they wouldn't go further offshore) and have a pretty fatalistic discourse "the maritime environment is like that". Wives work to sensitize men about the need for care. If they feel the need for support, men do not ask for it. However, the association observes that when it leads men to psychological center, men make appointment to benefit from counseling.

The Association and the professionneals workers of the medico-psychological emergency unit (cells of medico-psychological emergency in France are a device for

psychological care of victims of terrorist attacks, disasters and accidents collective), are working together for 3 years in order to coordinate their actions at the departmental level for offering a continuing support of victims. Now they are no longer victims who are moving to the medico-psychological emergency unit, but it is the medico-psychological emergency unit which is going to meet people, just a few days after the event (this is crucial for the islanders of the Ile d'Yeu and Noirmoutier). By their proximity to the population, the SSM and the association AFMV within the network have a role of vigilance concerning the behavior of people. When it detects abnormal behavior, the association now quickly knows which service it should direct people: *"We used to relay a little. And then we allow associations to come to us because we are people of the land, we are families of fishermen. So we have not the same look the administrator may have because he has a particular role, and needs to be in his administrative role and the social worker too. So we can work together. But it was really such a role. So with the medico-psychological emergency unit, this role is really this one. Because the unit also needed to know how people worked, it's a closed world the maritime world. With its customs these are things that are deeply rooted and even, that can be different from one port to another. So suddenly, we serve more than that. We have more work like that. With the psychologist, nurses, social workers, we're a link, yes it is in fact a link. When we moved to work ... They need to work with people of the land. But taking the sailor who passes on the street is not necessarily obvious either"* (interview No. 11).

This collaboration has resulted in the drafting of a brochure designed to educate people about the occurrences at sea and to direct them to counseling center. Today, the group works on improving the announcement of the accident to the families and incentives for consultation by the seafarers doctor before coming back on board.

Thus, if the results achieved by the project FEMMAR show that women fully take on board their technical function and identify themselves primarily to the maritime community rather than to their sex, women in the fishing sector have a specific concern for others, especially through their associations. Whether they protect the environment, preserve their economic activity, convey the words of others, or protect the working conditions, women play an undeniable role as a vector of social link.