



Wellness of Seafarers - A strategic View

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 July 2017;
in revised form 26 July 2017;
accepted 14 August 2017.

Keywords:

seafarers, seafaring, wellness, mental health, Stress, depression.

ABSTRACT

Seafaring is a particular profession, in which workers are usually exposed to different environment that are related to the different duties on board ships. This profession demands more than most others by disturbing the mind, soul and body. Being far from home, away from people they care-about and dealing with a tough job in difficult situation can take a turn at any time. It is a need for the hour to address the mental health and wellbeing of them and to look into the issue, how to go about. We can understand there is a human and professional need to be addressed in this profession where the seafarers are away from their dear ones. When both the needs are not met adequately they undergo a state of stress, anger, upset, resentment and gradual decline in mental health and wellbeing. Depression and loneliness are the prime problem faced by them. Mental health issues are on the rise globally. This is a growing issue to be faced, explored, understood and encountered. This paper aims to explore the issues relating to mental wellbeing of the seafarers and to address the actions already in place. The paper wish to give exploratory report on the helping hand to be provided to the seafarers before they start their career or after they encounter the issues.

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1. Introduction.

With the booming of world economy, there is fleet addition everywhere that the life of ships is being extended and severe shortage of managers is further compounded by the higher standards imposed by the industry through various measures like Port State Control and ISM Code and the consequent difficulties faced by companies in finding good quality managers who can match these. With so many ships owners trapped in critical struggle to attract staff, the shipping barons can learn a thing or two from employer branding. Employee majorly likely to join that company which took care of their needs in case of emergency. Recent studies show that 60% of CEO's are worried about the need to attract and retain the best people, While Wrestling with the problems of making employment attractive, stress among seafarers have largely increased and social need is the important human factor to be satisfied becomes a challenge to be addressed. Shipping is considered as the lifeblood of the global economy. More than 80% of the world goods are carried by ship (Mason and Nair, 2013, Sui and Lam, 2011), and

the USA, the largest trading nation in the world, use sea cargo to move more than 90% of its export freight (Agarwal and Ergun, 2008). The global economic activities are changing and shipping industry is facing some structural changes too.

2. Problems faced by seafarers - The Human factor.

Talking about the quality of life of seafarers, they live in a totally different environment than others. But the imminent danger is the shortage in terms of quality and quantity. The Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC), published a range of insightful reports on the challenges faced by maritime crew, found that unsurprisingly, "seafarers reported high levels of work-related stress," however "they rarely sought medical help and strategies to combat stress appeared to be limited to physical exercise." Due to a high level of prejudice and poor education about tackling mental health and its implications, seafarers are not likely to seek counseling or professional support, often with grave consequences. As they are in the same place for long periods of time, they can't escape this curse on stress. They are affected by isolation, depression and loneliness which probably the most common mental problems."

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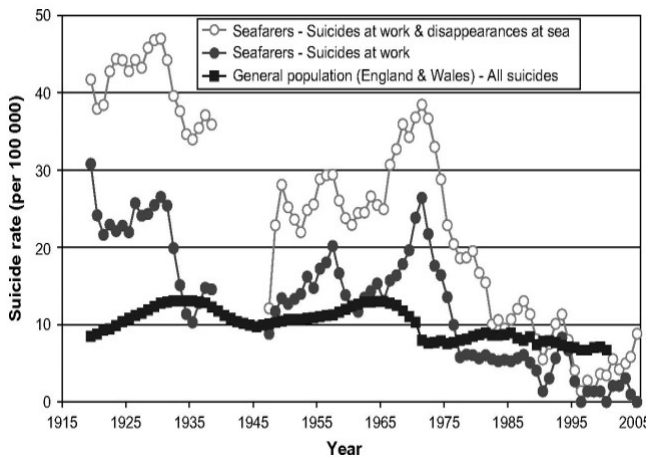
Many seafarers live under the constant threat of piracy attacks, robberies and assaults, an increasingly common occurrence at sea. Research by maritime analyst Dryad showed that in 2014 there were 235 attacks worldwide, and the majority of which took place in Southeast Asia. In the same year, 44 crew were estimated to be held captive following pirate attacks. According to the ITF Seafarers Trust, nearly five thousand seafarers have been hijacked in recent years and detained for months in frequently appalling conditions, and thousand others are the victims of the pirate attacks. Even in the cases where hostages are not being taken, the crew is often injured, abused and left traumatized by the assault.

Different cultures are often found aboard ships and differing cultural expressions and stigma associated with the mental illness can make it difficult to recognize and to treat effectively. Seafarers who are severely depressed, thinking of suicide or self-harm may not tell their fellow crew members, because mental illness is not discussed openly in their cultures.

2.1. Statistics of mental health issues among the seafarers.

Recent Research published in 2013 by Dr Stephen Roberts from Swansea University showed that between 2001 and 2005, merchant seafarers scored the second highest level of suicides amongst all professions, after coal miners. Today, the rate of suicide for international seafarers is triple that of shore workers, according to the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Figure 1



Source: xxxxxxxxxx.

3. Causes and remedies for Mental Illness.

The mental illness here is addressed as the unwarranted mental disorder mostly left unnoticed among the seafarers which leads to severe consequences.

The seafarers who are into such disorders or trauma can be identified as follows.

If for more than two weeks they have, felt sad, down or miserable most of the time, low interest or pleasure in most of their unusual activities, not getting things done at work, with drawing from close family and friends, relying on alcohol and

sedatives, no longer doing things they enjoyed, unable to concentrate thoughts, feelings overwhelmed, guilty, irritable, frustrated, no confidence, unhappy, indecisive, disappointed miserable.

Sad Physical conditions like tired all the time, sick and run down, headaches and muscle pains, churning gut, sleep problem, loss or change of appetite, significant weight loss or gain

Certain events which can be of high risk are, family conflict, isolation or loneliness, having serious medical illness, drug or alcohol use, changes in the brain, having a family member with depression

It's important to remember that each person is different and it is often a combination of factors that can help a person tread the situation.

Psychological treatments can help the individual relax and be relieved.

- Change negative thoughts and feelings
- Encourage the person to get involved in activities
- Prevent from reoccurring
- Identify ways to manage the illness and stay well

It would be unhelpful to

- Put pressure on them by telling them to 'snap out of it'
- Stay away or avoid them
- Tell them they just need to stay busy or get out more
- Pressure them to party more
- Wipe out how they are feeling with drugs and alcohol

4. Possible steps taken by organisations.

The Wellness at Sea programme was initiated in 2010 in South Africa by Johan Smith, a port chaplain in Cape Town, with the support of a number of seafarer trusts and organisations. At the time, the Sailors' Society was looking into ways to tackle poor retention rates for maritime staff and the difficulty of attracting people to a career at sea. Fewer and fewer people want to go into a career at sea and the global shipping industry's popularity has plunged. Richard Clayton, chief analyst at IHS Maritime & Trade recently highlights this trend saying: "I think the second significant trend is around seafarers and the fact that fewer people want to go to sea, because shipping is seen as a not very attractive form of employment. People want to stay on shore. People want to be around their friends and their family." Smith's Wellness at Sea programme tackled this issue head-on. In December 2014, the society co-opted him and today's scheme was born. On 22 April 2015, it was launched during the Singapore Maritime Week at the Sea Asia 2015 conference.

Conclusion.

Mental health amongst seafarers is hugely under-researched topic and organizations have started to think more about the human element. It is essential that the operations can be made more reliable when the crew force is a happy crew. But it doesn't mean that seafarers are alone for that the crew management, which brings the focus to the seafarers working on the ships. Human being is not having a single problem, many reasons are there but the main point of focus is everyone on the ship should have a relation like a family which can solve many issues. It is understood that the leaders and the supervisors who are technically strong should be human resource managers who can be proactive in their thoughts, predictive in understanding the moods and motivating in all angles using cordial communication which can resort to a congenial atmosphere among them. Effective courses can be organized for improving the mental well-being of maritime staff so that their struggle to withstand the adverse circumstances, can be overcome easily. With all the latest technological improvement and the height of global competition, the human factor and the integrated effort in han-

dling well-being of the maritime staff surely makes Shipping – Indispensable.

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