



An Overview of the Impact of the Pandemic on Seafarers': Mental and Physical Health.

Vairavan C.^{1,*}

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 epidemic had negative influence on the well-being and mental health of seafarers who were forced to stay on ships after their contracts expired. This article looks at these effects, identifies issues that contribute to their mental discomfort, and suggests ways to deal with them. Due to the closure of national and international borders as well as the cancellation of flights, this has severely affected free crew changes. Seafarers who have had prolonged stays on ships have failed to recognize the current scenario. They are key workers in terms of their essential role in maintaining the flow of vital goods all over the world. Many of the seafarers are working on ships for long contracts; they are affected mentally as well as physically. Such difficult situations have made them feel tired and restless. The individual experiences of seafarers on board and at home in terms of mental stress and physical health in the context of the global pandemic are discussed.

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1. Introduction.

Coronavirus is a highly infectious disease that was first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The strain of the virus is SARS-CoV-2. Within two to three months of being reported, it spread rapidly throughout the world, infecting approximately 17371,856 people. It mainly affects the respiratory system, blocking the nasal passage to the lungs. This causes a deficiency of oxygen, leading to a heart attack. COVID arrived in India near the end of February, and within a month it assumed its devil face, killing thousands of people. It was first reported in the states of Kerala and Thrissur in India. India is still fighting with this deadly virus, and recently, vaccination has been started to make the fight against COVID-19 easier. Pathak (2020) described how seafarers are no strangers to confinement. At that time, seafarers stay on board for their entire contract period with little to no possibility of taking shore leave. With very few crew members on board, the seafarers run a fully functional

township, making their own power, water, and food, managing routine near-misses, and sometimes dealing with full-blown crises. WHO (2020) analysed In shipping situations in which physical distancing of at least one metre cannot be implemented in full, the master or skipper should consider whether that activity needs to continue, and if it does, take all mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission; for example, by staggering times for activities, minimising face-to-face interactions, using a fabric mask, placing crew side by side to work, or having them work facing away from one another rather than face to face.

The theories of organizational stress, including the Occupation Demands-Resources model, demanding parts of work can exhaust employees' resources and energy, raising the risk of problems with their physical and mental health. Seafarer's demands are defined as physical, social, or organizational elements of the work that necessitate persistent physical or mental effort and are consequently connected with particular physiological and psychological consequences (e.g., exhaustion. Resources on the onboard are aspects of the position that help employees accomplish their objectives, promote professional growth, or lower the amount of demands on the position and the costs incurred by those demands. Characteristics of the sec-

¹Assistant Professor. Academy of Maritime Education and Training (AMET) Deemed University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

*Corresponding author: Vairavan C. E-mail Address: vairavaneng@gmail.com.

tor (such as job instability, lengthy periods spent at sea) and work design variables such as physical demands, shift work, and workload. The workers are well-known employment requirements in the marine setting. Other workplace needs include isolation, loneliness, separation from family, and lack of shore leave.

It is possible that the Covid-19 epidemic may add to the workload or possibly create new demands that will have a negative impact on seafarers' mental health. The harmful impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on results for mental health in the general population as well as in certain industries are, in fact, beginning to receive empirical confirmation. More than half of the questioned population reported having poor mental health, which suggests that the pandemic has had a significant influence on the levels of psychological distress experienced by front-line workers and the general public. But more thorough comparisons that account for pre-pandemic levels of mental health and wellbeing present a more nuanced picture. In relation to measures of mental health and wellbeing, the researchers discovered conflicting results when they used propensity matched samples from a variety of industries. Although their findings point to higher levels of mental anguish during the epidemic, the impacts were not as significant as first anticipated and did not affect other wellbeing markers.

2. Review of Literature.

Baygi et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2021, suggested that the pandemic might have led to an increase in mental health problems. Shan (2021) portrayed how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated some pre-existing challenges while also posing new ones for the maritime industry. For this period, it is very difficult to get medical assistance and supplies or carry out repairs and maintenance work (Doubmbia-Henry, 2020; Hebbar and Mukesh, 2020; Shan, 2021). Many of the seafarers thought their minds would be speeded up by our family members, and "challenges included the fear of infection, uncertainty, job insecurity, and concerns about the well-being of family and friends at home" (Coutroubis et al., 2020; Shan, 2021; Sliskovic, 2020). For this occasion, measures implemented to reduce the spread of the virus, such as border closures and travel restrictions, have affected crew changes (Doubmbia-Henry, 2020; Shan, 2021). Baygi et al., 2021; Qin et al., (2021) described that in the healthcare sector or the general population, there is some emerging evidence that seafarers also experienced high levels of psychological distress, depression, and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jepsen et al., 2017; Mellbye and Carter, 2017; Osterman et al., 2020 describe the maritime context. Characteristics of the profession (e.g., isolation, loneliness, separation from family, lack of shore leave), industry characteristics (e.g., job insecurity, long periods of time on board), and work design factors (e.g., physical aspects of work, shift-work, workload) are well-known job demands. Sampson and Ellis (2020) proved that the significant effects of length of time on board and 'Flag of Convenience' registers suggest that in order to understand the prevalence of mental health problems in the maritime industry, we need to go beyond individual level risk factors and

take into account systemic risk factors associated with industry practices.

3. Importance of Seafarers.

COVID-19 has made the whole world stop, creating a major crisis all over the world. Maritime transport carries 90% of total world trade. Thus, seafarers are the silent servants of the nation, bringing us our daily essential goods. They are one of the important backbones for a chain-wise rise in the economy of every country. The outbreak of this lethal virus has not freed seafarers or millions of other people from its clutches. The UN Human Rights Office (2020) pointed out that workers in the maritime shipping industry play a critical role in sustaining global supply chains; their role has become even more vital during the pandemic, as they work to ensure the continuous flow of medical equipment, food, and other essential goods.

4. Mental stress of Seafarers.

All over the world, every government has called for lock down to save the nation from the hand of the SARS-CoV-2 infection. This included the closure of national and international borders as well as international flights. As a result, companies have changed some of their policies and have slowed down the change of crew. The men and women are on longer contracts and are unable to disembark due to travel restrictions and other factors. Such a difficult situation has put them in a very precarious situation. Those who have been trapped in ships for an extended period of time have been discovered broken, both physically and mentally. They feel tired and out of sync with their bodies and minds. This equilibrium is critical for remaining happy and fit on board. They feel unsafe and fatigued staying for 7-8 months or more in that enclosed environment, but the companies fail to understand it. Companies are only seeing their profit part, so they have decreased crew change, but no one is thinking of keeping them on a seafarer's side. Many people are staying on ships on over-contracting signs and extra pay because they are not permitted to return home. This is a truly pitiful condition to be in.

The plight of seafarers has become a question in the Safety Crisis, as any crew change or visit to any shore, including a pilot boarding, may introduce the virus on board despite best practices for quarantine and testing of other members on the ship. Due to the uncertainty of the time spent away from home, seafarers feel loneliness and fear for their loved ones at home. This causes them to feel mentally lost and, at times, unconscious of their responsibilities, which is not a good representation of good seamanship practices. In other scenarios, many cadets who had not yet completed their training and seafarers sucked it up at home while waiting to board a ship. Many stranded seafarers are the only breadwinners in their families. They, as well as other mariners, are facing financial worries and mental stress. Despite the mental crisis, many seafarers have committed suicide, according to recent reports. In comparison to economically unstable areas, reports relating to mental and physical

well-being were relatively underrepresented for the seafarers located at home.

5. Comfort of seafarers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seafarers' working conditions and mental health deteriorated as COVID-19 expanded and border lockdowns were implemented for a variety of reasons. In this situation, the seafarers must work and are unable to provide shore leave. Seafarers have followed certain rules and regulations during the pandemic period, such as:

- In an effort to contain the virus, many nations have banned air travel from areas where outbreaks occur. This has made it challenging for shipping companies to plan for crew changes and repatriations. Due to this, a large number of seafarers were unable to leave the ships when their contracts were over, and an equal number were unable to board the ships to begin their contracts.
- Second, there were more requirements, protocols, and standards for preventing COVID-19 aboard ships and in ports, which added to the effort and constraints for seafarers.
- The third was that port officials forbade shore leave and viewed sailors as possible virus carriers.
- Fourthly, each time cases of infections or fatalities related to COVID-19 infections were reported, the fear of illness or death as a result of these infections would increase.
- Fifth, the COVID-19 epidemic has a greater psychological impact on seafarers whose contracts have expired but who are unable to return home.

6. Psychology of Seafarers.

The psychological and physical health of sailors is now a hot topic in many maritime sector debates thanks to Covid-19. Around 90% of the world's trade is transported by shipping, and the majority of the marine labour consists of seafarers. Covid-19 has a significant impact on seafarers' living and working conditions, which are already very difficult in most circumstances. They are currently experiencing an unparalleled level of stress due to travel restrictions and the refusal of several governments to classify seafarers as important employees. Seafarers who are stranded are unable to return home and others are unable to sign up for new jobs. This issue is still very much a concern, and it might even continue to worsen. The Mission to Seafarers charity's newest Seafarers' Happiness Index shows that crews feel unsupported during COVID-19, mostly because of extended obligations, a lack of shore leave, poor connectivity, and worries about mental wellbeing. There is also a concerning rise in pressure and interpersonal conflicts on board, all of which have a major negative impact on seafarers' mental health. Additionally, alarming data show an increase in member of the crew suicides on passenger ships and a rise in occurrences

of men going overboard in COVID-19. The demand for social and psychological support for sailors is growing.

The mental health of seafarers has only recently begun to receive attention. We will concentrate on two common mental health issues: depression and anxiety. Depression is distinguished by a low mood and anhedonia, or a loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities. Excessive anxiety and worry (apprehensive expectation) about a number of events or activities characterise anxiety. Depression and anxiety are closely related: they frequently co-occur, have overlapping symptoms, and may share a genetic predisposition. By taking care of themselves, seafarers can reduce the risks associated with their employment at sea and maintain good physical and mental health. Being psychologically healthy refers to being able to operate normally, feeling generally positive about oneself and one's life, as well as having a sense of life satisfaction, purpose, and direction in life. Seafarers' general health benefits from psychological well-being, which may even extend our lifespan. The paper attempts to understand seafarers' fatigue and has begun to explore mental health issues. However, little is known about how crises like the Covid-19 outbreak effect seafarers' exhaustion and mental health issues. This pandemic has affected every seafarer, both physically and mentally. On a ship, someone who is not mentally fully engaged cannot be physically engaged, which leads to accidents.

Thousands of sailors are just forced to stay on the ship, so they are staying. In actuality, they are broken, faded, and tired of such extreme, limitless hard work and an extreme workload. After many deaths and injuries, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) have mandated that during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, companies and port authorities must priorities the effective protection of seafarers' health and safety. We all know that when you are on a ship, you are devoted to work for twenty-four hours a day and during any emergency situation. Yes, rest is given, but for those frustrated seafarers, that much rest is not enough to be physically active for such a long time. After all, we are humans, not robots. The social well-being of the seafarer is at stake, and they now feel more like prisoners, as they, too, are unsure of their release date. Many local governments keep ships waiting for a long time and don't allow them to enter; this is also a reason for the delay in ending the contract. Most of the ports are not even following proper safety measures during the arrival and departure of vessels. As a result, many reports have been discovered in which members entering the ship become infected and, unfortunately, infect other members of the ship, resulting in an unhealthy working environment. A study by global maritime charity Stella Maris on the impact of Covid-19 on seafarers was done, and it was found that the Philippine's crew are really in danger, and most of them are done with this uncertain stay on ship.

7. Endorsements for shipping companies.

Following the pandemic, shipping companies hire a large number of seafarers, but some of them earn very little. Particularly, the entry-level cadets are getting very few.

- Encourage seafarers by acknowledging their contributions to mankind and international trade and by treating them as important workers.
- Increase seafarers' pay to make jobs at sea more appealing, particularly when profitability rises as a result of increased freight. Encourage seafarers by acknowledging their contributions to humanity and international trade and by treating them as important workers.
- Improve the training provided to mariners in leadership, teamwork, EQ management, good communication, and safe systems of work.
- Improve onboard communication, recreation, and food. People on land take these things for granted, but mariners do not.

Conclusions.

Yes, this is a very tough situation, but the seafarer should never lose hope. Seafarers are really passing through very hard times. To keep their patience for sailing, they should include more fun, interesting games and other activities. They have far gone from understanding the meaning of key or essential workers. Though, they are doing a great job serving the world in this crisis, they have lost faith in themselves somewhere. Seafarers can't let this situation break us. Seafarers have to think and keep themselves positive to survive and make the future better. According to a December 2020 report, 400,000 seafarers are still on ships after their contracts have expired. Therefore, the IMO has established the Seafarer Crisis Action Team (SCAT) to help the needy seafarers. Recent developments, undoubtedly sparked by the effects of Covid-19, highlight the essential need to support the psychological health and welfare of the personnel in the marine industry. In order to safeguard sailors' comfort, more than 800 entities signed the Neptune Declaration on Seafarer Wellbeing in February 2021. To educate leaders in the industry on worker mental health and wellbeing, Maritime UK introduced a mental wellbeing commitment in March 2021.

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