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PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF SEAFARING

Dr. Suresh N. Idnani

Vice-President, IMHA & Regional Coordinator South Asia, ICSW



A seafarer is a peculiar animal. He is a stranger when he comes ashore and is the odd man out in almost any situation. We cater for the loneliness of the seafarer- that might sum the whole thing up. When you come home, you stick out like a sore thumb – the world has gone on without you and it is not going to stop to fit you into it. Often, this is part of the loneliness of seafarers. A man goes to sea, he begins to look forward to coming home. He begins to wish his time away at sea; that's a dangerous thing for a man to do. He is in danger of losing his soul, I would say – his sense of being. He comes ashore and its fiesta time for him and nobody else. All too often the leave you look forward to falls flat on its face.

Padre in charge of a Seaman's Mission

One thing all seafarers have in common, regardless of rank, nationally or trade, is the fact that their work separates them from their families. The working and social environment of a seafarer makes him vulnerable to psychosocial problems, injuries and diseases. Seafarers' families are an important but neglected aspect of seafaring. Family members, including parents, siblings, partners, children and extended family, can all have an impact on the experiences of seafarers and on the decisions they make during their maritime career. Families can have a significant effect on a person's entry into the industry. For exam-

ple, research on women seafarers has found that, for many, the decision to embark upon a career at sea was precipitated by having a seafaring relative. Some families provide initial financial assistance for maritime education and training and may economically facilitate a seafarer's departures to sea. When the seafarer is at sea, families can give a sense of purpose and meaning to a seafarer's life and work aboard ship. They provide seafarers with an important source of contact and communication during long tours of duty and a base to return to during their leave periods. Families can also play a decisive role in a seafarer's length of service: separation from family has been found to be one of the most stressful aspects of a seafarer's life and can have a strong influence on whether a seafarer stays at sea or not.

The demands of paid employment invariably require workers to be separated from their families. Seafarers are not unusual in this. However, such separations can become significant when considerable portions of time are spent away from partners and families. For seafarers, ratios of leave to work vary, but even under the most favourable employment conditions seafarers are likely to spend at least six months of any year at sea. For seafarers in weaker labour market positions, spending ten months or more working aboard ship, with only a couple of months (unpaid) leave before returning to sea, is not unusual. Such patterns of

work inevitably have an impact on family life, while prolonged absences from families correspondingly affect seafarers' experiences of their work.

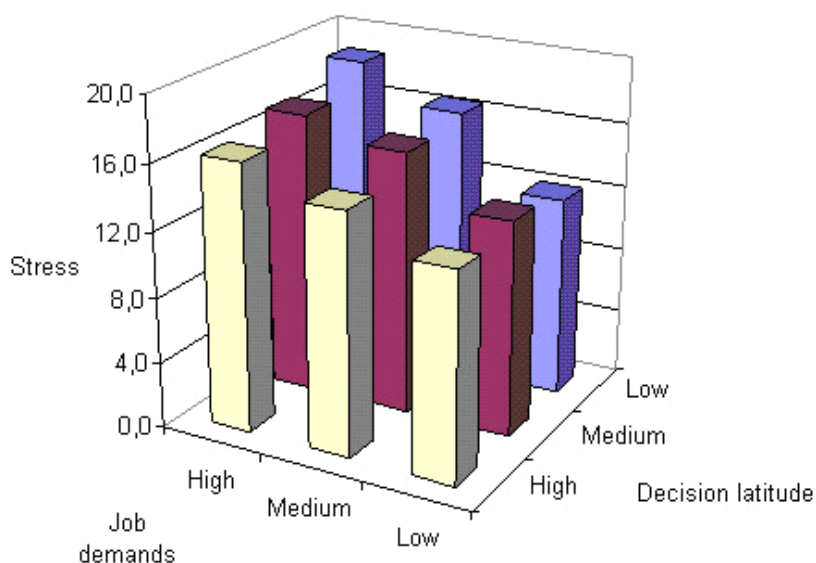
Periods of separation can be particularly demanding for couples with young children: seafarers miss their children, and their partners have to cope with the demands of parenthood and all its associated decisions on their own. Some seafarers' wives seem to find that their social lives are more restricted when their husbands are absent, feeling that many events are inappropriate without their partner; additionally, some are concerned that they might attract unwanted sexual attention were they to attend events unaccompanied. However, life on returning home isn't automatically rosy. Prolonged separations can have a dramatic impact on the lives of families, with children scarcely knowing their absent parent and partners feeling that their lives are more "normal" when their "other half" is at sea. Some partners become so adept at managing the home and family alone that, on their return home, seafarers can become disillusioned on the realization that their family has functioned successfully in their absence. As one seafarer commented: "I always felt, not as if I wasn't important, but that they could survive without me."

There are other factors that can lead to problems during seafarers' periods of leave. Their intermittent presence at home can make it difficult for them to develop and maintain shore-based friendships, which can result in loneliness or high levels of dependency on partners and immediate family for social contact. Even where friendships are maintained, the work patterns and commitments of people in shore-based employment often mean that seafarers still spend a significant

amount of their free time alone. Indeed, some seafarers can find themselves looking forward to returning to sea because of long and unstructured periods of leave.

Problems associated with seafaring work patterns can peak during the transitional periods from ship to shore and from home back to sea. On their return home, seafarers have to make the difficult adjustment between the dramatically different worlds of work and home, while their partners have to get used to having another adult in the household again. Tensions develop when seafarers first return home and unwind and adjust to family life again. Increased workloads because of reduced crewing levels and less job security have led to a rise in the levels of stress and fatigue, which have an impact on both work and family life. Seafarers may return home physically exhausted, emotionally tense and unable to relax and "switch off" immediately from their shipboard responsibilities. Conflict can also occur as seafarers attempt to assume the position of "head of the household." The period before a seafarer's return to sea can also be fraught with tension as couples anticipate the departure and seafarers become anxious about completing practical tasks and meeting social obligations before returning to sea.

As is apparent from the above data, the rise in stress levels is directly propor-



tional to the demands of the job and the hierarchy of decision making. Besides this, seafaring work patterns and the associated intermittent absences of seafarers from their families can have detrimental consequences on both health and safety. A study of Australian seafarers found that the “home/work interface’ was reported to be the greatest source of stress for them, regardless of rank, findings that have been reiterated by studies of workers in the offshore industries. Research work carried out on harbour physicians in Rotterdam, the Netherlands identified three main psychological problems among seafarers: loneliness, homesickness and “burn – out “syndrome. These problems were primarily caused by long periods away from home, the decline in the number of seafarers per ship and increased automation. The stress associated with frequent absences from home can become particularly acute when there is a family crisis. Such anxieties can be

Especially difficult for seafarers to deal with while at sea, since many seafarers find it difficult for seafarers to deal with while at sea, since many seafarers find it difficult to speak about emotional domestic problems and seafarers find it difficult to speak about emotional domestic problems and seafarers cannot draw on shore-based social networks, which they might normally turn to for support. Living with family problems while at sea can have severe consequences: investigations into suicide at sea have identified the role of marital and family problems as a contributory factor.

In addition to affecting a seafarer’s health, anxieties about family members and loneliness caused by prolonged separations and the lack of opportunity for any contact can have an impact on work performance, which may have significant repercussions on safety in the workplace. Research carried out on airline pilots has suggested that domestic stress and other major life events can have a detrimental effect on a pilot’s judgement and well-being. The importance of the spouse as a social support system, enabling the pilot to cope with stress, has

been acknowledged by the aviation industry, along with the specific problems associated with a marriage where one partner is frequently absent. Indeed, even where there are no perceived problems in family relations, the emotional deprivation associated with prolonged absences from partners and loved ones can lead to

psychological deterioration and increased rates of emotional tension, which, in turn, may lead to a rise in stress levels, emotional alertness and aggression, all of which threaten individual and workplace health and safety. Behavioural changes as a result of family and relationship problems have frequently been reported in research on British seafarers.

As one senior officer recalled:

Another guy actually comes to mind- he’s another engineer. He was just really obnoxious and nasty to everyone for quite a while and then we sort of found out – he got violent one night with the second mate after a night of drinking in a port – that his missus was sort of carrying on behind his back, you know. And he didn’t talk about it at all until, “That bitch, I’ve divorced her”, that sort of thing. So yeah, but I mean that was the way that guy reacted, you know. He didn’t tell anyone at all – he was just, like, sort of miserable and sort of horrible.

Finally, although seafarers’ partners do not have the pressures of physically having to leave their homes and families, there is some evidence to suggest that their partners’ intermittent absences can have a detrimental effect on their own health: the rates of depression and anxiety among seafarers’ partners are higher than in the general population. An Australian study of seafarers’ wives found that 83 per cent of the respondents reported some degree of stress when their partners were due home or about to return to sea, with nearly one in ten (8 percent) reporting that they took medication to help them cope.

Not only can seafarers find it difficult

to form close, long – term friendships while at sea, many find that maintaining shore – based friendships is far from easy; long absences and the cost of ship – shore communication do not facilitate close friendships. Seafarers, therefore, tend to rely to a very large extent on their partners and immediate family as a means of social support and as a link to wider social networks. As Fricke has noted: “The wife provides the vicarious link with society ashore for the married officer through the provision of home and a network of friends. In this context, the consequences of a relationship breakdown can be particularly severe.

There is also mounting concern with seafarers’ fatigue and seafaring research indicates that

- Collision risk is greatest during the early hours of the morning, suggesting a circadian influence. Fatigue has been proposed as a contributory factor.
- Seafarers report elevated levels of anxiety, perceived work load, dissatisfaction with shift schedules and sleep problems.
- Environmental factors are related to sleep disturbances, fatigue and stress.
- Motion adversely affects cognitive and psychomotor performance.
- Circadian adaptation can only be partially achieved at best on 4-on/8-off shift systems.



There is evidence that psychosocial stressors unique to seafaring life impact mental health. (Parkes, 1997; 1998), yet

other studies have either failed to examine the psychological state of participants, or concluded that they were no worse off than their onshore counterparts (Gann et al., 1990; Parker et al., 1998). However, it is apparent from the self-reported data that increased workload, excessive work hours, poor quality or lack of sleep and feelings of boredom and isolation all contribute to stress, poor mental health and fatigue off-shore (Parkes, 1997; Parker et al, 1997; 1998). Hence, it is necessary to identify all aspects of the working environment that may lead to fatigue, and affect the health and general well-being of the seafarer. It is also essential to encompass all aspects of his life, and assess the nature of tours of duty, work and rest patterns, fatigue and sleep, health-related behaviour and general health and well-being.

Global concern in regard to seafarer fatigue and the potential environmental cost is widely evident everywhere in the shipping industry. Maritime regulators, ship owners, trade unions and P & I clubs are all alert to the fact that in some ship types, a combination of minimal manning, sequences of rapid turnarounds and short sea passages, adverse weather and traffic conditions, may find seafarers working long hours and with insufficient recuperative rest. In these circumstances fatigue and reduced performance may lead to environmental damage, ill-health and reduced life-span among highly skilled seafarers who are in short supply.

Recent research by SIRC has analyzed mortality data and found supply ship’s masters to have high incidence levels of cardiovascular disease. Seafarers also tend to have poor lifestyle habits and are prone to smoking, increased alcohol consumption, use of medication, lifestyle related illnesses like insomnia, obesity, peptic ulcers, depression etc. Besides, the incidence of accidents and injuries requiring medical attention amongst them is much higher than that of the onshore population.

All this calls for increased awareness, concern and assistance from all seafarer welfare organizations and the services

offered to the seafarer should encompass and address these psychosocial issues. Maritime regulators, insurers, ship owners, trade unions and welfare agencies should work closely under one umbrella so as not to duplicate efforts and also to improve the quality of existing services.

The variation in life onboard ship can be clearly seen from the following quote:

“The life of a shipmaster has been described as hours of boredom punctuated by moments of terror” (Lowell, 1998).

Резюме

СОЦИАЛЬНО-ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ МОРЕПЛАВАНИЯ

Суреш Н. Иднани

Рассмотрены основные социально-психологические профессионально обусловленные проблемы, с которыми сталкивается моряк в море и на берегу. Показано, что специфика условий и характера труда, режимов труда и отдыха, психоэмоциональный стресс, длительная социальная изоляция и сексуальная депривация, вахтенный труд, хронобиологические факторы рейса лежат в основе хронического физиологического утомления, эмоционального и профессионального выгорания, психобиологических изменений организма и личности моряка.

Вопросы профилактики и обеспечения безопасности плавсостава необходимо решать объединенными усилиями судовладельцев, профсоюзов и компетентных международных организаций.

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СОЦІАЛЬНО-ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ АСПЕКТИ МОРЕПЛАВСТВА

Суреш Н. Іднани

Розглянуті основні соціально-психологічні проблеми, з якими зустрічається моряк в морі та вдома. Показано, що специфіка умов та характеру праці, режимів праці і відпочинку, психоемоційний стрес, довгочасна соціальна ізоляція і сексуальна депривація, вахтовий характер трудової діяльності, хронобіологічні фактори рейсу лежать в основі хронічної фізіологічної втоми, емоційного та професійного вигорання, психофізіологічних змін організму та особистості моряка. Питання профілактики і забезпечення безпеки плавскладу необхідно вирішувати об'єданими зусиллями судовласників, профспілок та компетентних міжнародних організацій.

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ПРИОРИТЕТЫ ПСИХОФИЗИОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ В МЕДИЦИНЕ ТРУДА НА ТРАНСПОРТЕ

Панов Б.В. *, Пономаренко А.Н. **, Гоженко А.И. *

**Украинский НИИ медицины транспорта, Одесса,*

*** Министерство здравоохранения Украины, Киев*

Медицина труда как область науки и практики здравоохранения возникла в Украине в начале 90-х годов XX столетия главным образом на базе такой дисциплины, как гигиена труда и профессиональные заболевания, и до настоящего времени идет процесс ее становления и развития. Сегодня уже с полным правом можно говорить о том, что медицина труда - это интегративная область профи-

лактической и лечебной медицины, целью которой является управление состоянием здоровья работающего человека, а предметом - научное обоснование и практическое внедрение средств и методов его сохранения и укрепления. Достаточно существенным фрагментом медицины труда за последнее десятилетие становятся исследования в области психофизиологии работающих во вредных и