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Increase of the crew's well-being and reduction of stress

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Abstract. In 2017-2018 the International Marine Organization (IMO) puts in foreground the increase of well-being and mental health of the crew. The goal of the current scientific message is to represent the peculiarities and specifics of the marine profession, the stress factors and their negative effect on health, and the measures of prevention and dealing with stress. The members of the crew are exposed to a variety of predicaments that occur from the specifics of working in marine environment. The disturbing trends in the increasing number of the seafarers, who are affected by the negative aftermath of stress in the last few years, imposes the necessity of undertaking a number of real actions by employers. The lack of a doctor and psychologist on the ships imposes the necessity of performing a number of actions, which guarantee the health, and both the physical and mental safety of the seafarers. The prevention, preliminary training and courses need to be directed to maximal awareness and encouraging the use of the developed specialized programs for well-being, recognizance of the first mental changes in seafarers, the ways of help and self-help, forming and developing social and emotional intelligence. The investment in people's well-being would surely provide a competitive advantage in the shipping company, and give a direct impact in both turnover, and career perspective of young people who have chosen one of the most difficult and dangerous, but significant occupations.

Keywords: stress, well-being, marine environment, stress factors, techniques in dealing with stress, prevention, training.

1. Introduction

The term welfare reflects the level of the socio-economical, physical, mental and spiritual state of the individual, or community. The origin of the word comes from the English well-being, welfare, prosperity [1]. It's proven that stress has a direct impact on every aspect of people's welfare. Stress is a biological process, via which the organism is trying to adapt to some challenge by mobilizing its energy for fight and survival. Hans Selier (1982) is one of the first explorers who in 1956 develops the theory of the general syndrome of adaptation in three phases: anxiety reaction; resistance phase; and exhaustion phase. The unfavorable effects of stress factors lead to exhaustion and health problems, diseases and states of chronic fatigue, depression, insomnia, anxiety, migraine, emotional disorders, allergies, excessive smoking and alcohol abuse. Chronical stress may lead to hypertension, cardiovascular and cerebral-vascular diseases, ulcers, affection of the immune system and cancer development [2]. The unfavorable influence of stress affects the individuals, organizations and the entire society. This influence in individuals expresses itself in bad health, mishaps, dissatisfaction from work, expenses for medicaments and medical checks. As for the organizations - expressing in drop of productivity, bad efficiency, compensations, fluctuation, and labor conflicts. And as for the entire society - expressing in

health care expenses, a drop in efficiency and competitive power of economy. Professional stress is typical for a number of occupations, one of them being the sailor.

The factors responsible for professional stress are a few types: The first group has to do with the individual characteristics of the person – in equal conditions of the working environment one part of them are being affected by the stress effects, whereas the others aren't. The personal qualities that are defined as risk factors are: display of low self-confidence and trust, constant necessity of approval, eagerness, tolerance, perfectionism, and exceptive personal devotion. The second group of factors has to do with the kind of labor - its working environment and equipment, labor content, workload and rate of working, schedule of working time, work overload, insufficient salary, no justice, no sense of community and conflicting environment, no opportunity for making decisions or having control , relations, organizational structure and culture [3; 4; 5; 6]. According to Maslach C., specific factors of the working environment are also the demographic fluctuations and their risk factors: young age, start of one's career, and mismatch between expectations for career development and reality. [7; 8].

Those represented factors are equally valid for all risky occupations, but work in marine environment suggests additional preconditions of stress. As a result of the overview of a number of articles that deal with exploring the specificities of marine environment, a great number of stress factors are being differentiated . The grouped together stress factors that are pointed by the workers in the marine environment, are: physical stressors that include different temperatures in working places, ship movement and sea sickness, hard physical work, as well as the weather changes during their voyage. The second group of factors are the psycho-social stressors, which include prolonged and unregulated working time, not enough time for sleep, detachment from family, long stay onboard, interpersonal conflicts, isolation, as well as impossibility of dividing a working environment from a recreation area. Another group of factors is about the kind of activities which include shortage of time, a fast rate of labor, high personal responsibility, monotony, lack of independence, insufficient qualification and preparation of the inferior part of the crew [9; 10]. Authoritarian management style, renders a great deal of importance for the mental health, especially that of beginner seafarers [11]. The interpersonal relations between the crew are an important factor for the mental health, and are a common reason for frequent deaths, caused by suicide [12].

An important factor is the social isolation in the sea. This may contribute to a series of problems, having to do with the mental health and stress in the workplace. The lack of social interaction on the ship is defined by the quite reduced number of the crew, an average of 20 men, as only around half of them could have intensive communication. The multi-cultural crew and the language barrier onboard the vessels with mixed ethnicities, could mean that the members of the crew don't have any possibility to freely speak their native language, which is also a stress element.

As for their physical health, its peculiarity expresses in that there is an enhanced sensitivity in insignificant complaints, by the fact that they are far from medical aid. An important moment for them is to pass a training process for the most common emergencies onboard the ship, the fast recognition of their symptoms, and opportunities for self-help [13]. A common dangerous physical state in seafarers is dehydration. They need awareness of the prevention, symptoms and what to do in case of dehydration [14].

The long courses and the short terms of stays in harbors, have to do with low possibilities for furlough onshore and change of the common environment. The unregulated working time and lack of opportunity for detaching of the environment and change of the people, with whom one talks throughout the day, is a significant cause of stress. Anxiety and depression raise by the fact that friends and family are far away, and the sorrow raises too, especially during holidays. An important moment of overcoming stress is to include family and friends as part of the supporting environment. Other specificities and risk of professional stress in seafarers, include routine daily activities, the lack of the well-known landscape, no supporting environment - family and friends, no social contacts, no place and time for some privacy, limited possibility for movement, and no variety in the food they consume. The difficulties in dealing with the responsibilities in the workplace, the lack of experience and mismatch between expectations and reality, is another cause of stress. A possible stressful factor is the eventual mistrust toward some

colleagues, the fight for leadership and domination. The abuse with torture, as well as the verbal and physical violence on mentally unstable and inexperienced sailors, is another serious problem onboard the ship. In those cases, the impartiality of the officer's staff in personal assessments of the crew and the right selection of work teams are very important for the microclimate onboard the ship [15; 16]. A formation of a good team is very important for the safety, comfort, psycho-social relations, emergence and prevention of conflicts. The captain's leadership qualities, his personal characteristics and also the good selection of the crew members, is crucial for forming a good team. Depending on the personal characteristics, people are distinguished as suitable and non-suitable for teamwork. Qualities such as bleakness, optimism, buoyancy, emotional stability, realistic self-esteem, personal responsibility, goodwill and uprightness, sympathy and helpfulness to work in the name of the general aim, are considered suitable for teamwork. Respectively, qualities like closeness, pessimism, hostility, lack of realistic self-esteem, emotional lability, enviousness, impropriety, malice, no group aim and no group joy, are considered non-suitable [17; 18].

The adaptation period for beginner seafarers is strictly individual, as every young man at the start of his career, seeks answers to a variety of questions, concerning whether he has made the right choice of occupation, and the upcoming inconsistencies between the concepts of work, and real situation. The hard adaptation has to do with the upcoming confusion, the lack of personal organization because of chronic fatigue, insomnia at harbors, the lack of experience, and rude, ironizing attitude. The lack of practical work in a real working environment, under the tutorship in some universities, additionally causes risk of emerging stress. The impossibility for one to cope with the hard obligations at first, may lead to depression, low self-esteem, a sense of guilt and refusing to work this occupation. Behavioral changes are also possible, like much smoking, alcoholism, medicament abuse, emotional lability and peevishness. De-adaptation may occur with high rates of blood pressure, insomnia, sweating, chronic fatigue and low productivity. Every newcomer on the ship needs to achieve quick adaptation and socialization. To achieve that, it's the support, understanding and motivation of young people, that is very important. Of great deal of importance are also both the mental and physical steadiness, as well as social and emotional intelligence. The young seafarers' vulnerability could be reinforced by the informal leaders on the ship, who may dictate mood and form attitude in other sailors. The hard adaptation and integration in a set hostile environment, could lead to a series of negative aftermath and even refusal of working this occupation, as well as physical interpersonal conflicts, and also to fighting with each other [19].

2. Presentment

On a conference in 2017 SAFEETY4SEA, in his presentation, David Nichol directs our attention to the mental health of the crew, and shows a disturbing statistics for the period of 2006-2017, which shows 355 cases, concerning mental health, including 77 cases of suicide. Other disturbing trends are also pointed out: a great part of those cases have to do with young seafarers, and there's an increase of suicide cases for the last few years. It's highly important to increase the knowledge of the questions that concern mental health, by emphasizing on the staff's training. A change in attitudes and providing communication that is directed to open discussion of the problems, without any mockery or irony. A maximal compliance of the cultural differences is needed, and granting the necessities of the individuals, as much as possible. The proper management of the Internet access onboard, prevents social isolation. The key is prevention, the early interference and the preliminary training so they could cope with stress [20].

The long-time experience, and number of tests of I. Peev in the field of marine psychology, give proof of the author's competent scientific achievements in the field, by representing them in the current article, in a synthesized way. The seafarers' welfare was pronounced as main device by the International Marine Organization (IMO), on the Global Day of the sailor for 2018. The attention of both the global navigation, and marine industry is directed to the mental health and welfare of the seafarers. The results of the new scientific tests, show us that over a quarter of the seafarers confess that they had felt hopelessly, depressed or unhappy.

Almost half of the seafarers tested, who have shown symptoms of depression, have answered that they've never asked anybody for help, and only 1/5 of them have shared their problems with some colleagues. The European Agency for safety and health at work, gives examples of many cases having to do with bad conditions, continuous workday and overwork, that have led to mishaps, of which quite frequently, is death on the workplace. The stress on the workplace, the bad attitude to the workers and personnel by the chiefs, the lack of control of the working time, and conditions, are also added. The disturbing conclusions about the seafarers' mental health, are directed mostly to the industries' attention. The shipping companies must offer some better care for their staff. In the spirit of the Manilla corrections of the Convention STCW -1978/1995/2010, the problem of increasing the seafarers' welfare, is being outlined for the first time in the history of global navigation and marine industry in 2017-2018, and it also stresses in their mental health and welfare. In the last few years, the care toward improving the relationships onboard, the welfare and physical and mental health of the seafarers, is growing. To do this, many international and national organizations work together and search for efficient solutions in this direction- organizations like: the International Marine Organization, the World Health Organization, the International Organization of Labor, the International Federation of transport workers, the Seafarers' Professional Union in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Executive Agency Marine Administration, and the International Committee of social well-being. The International Charity Organization "Sailors' Society" also has steered its deeds in that direction. For the goals of the specified organizations, statistical information and database are used from the Marine Coastal Agency (MCA) of the UK, and the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA). Thanks to this collaboration, new conventions and courses are being developed and started operating, which form the legal basis of the crew's work, the seafarers' competences, the working conditions and regime, including the seamen's rest, reduction of the trip continuances, etc. They work out programs, manuals and trainings for increasing the seafarers' well-being [21].

Progoulaki M. defines four dimensions of well-being that are based on detailed researches, which include organizational, managerial, physical and social measures. In an attempt to clarify the concept of well-being, MLC identifies the entertainment fittings as well as the communicational services, such as TV and radio facilities, films, sports facilities, library and communication facilities, including telephone and Internet services. Despite that both the working, and life conditions have recently attracted the academic circles' attention, the well-being and specified services remain a primary care for the countries, harbors, syndicates and other concerned parties. The well-being includes a wide range of aspects: the welfare and health of the individual seafarers; degree of satisfaction and from work and the welfare of a family; the crew's well-being while on ports and onboard; health and safety. The investment of quality in manpower and its results, can be considered as a strong competitive advantage of the shipping company. The welfare has also to do with respect of the seamen's rights, concerning both the working and life conditions, avoidance of abuse and financial exploitation, access to medical aid, etc. The well-being of seamen is a matter which could affect not only the individuals or the crew, but also indirectly, navigation itself. The presence and keeping of accredited seafarers, remains a serious problem for many people in the navigation sector. The welfare of the crew and their satisfaction from work, may have influence on the seafarers' decision to remain in the industry [22].

The unfavorable working conditions onboard a ship lead to lessening in the interest towards the marine occupation. For attracting young people to the marine industry, the working conditions onboard ships need to be improved, so they could correspond to the expectations of the new generation of people, looking for a job. Practically, this must be concentrated in the following fields: shortening of the prolonged courses in the sea and proportional co-ordination with resting periods, improvement of the Internet access as well as improving security and reducing stress in the workplace [23].

Aside from the measures directly concerning labor, actions need to be taken for managing stress, which are directed to both the person, and the organization. Personal lifestyle and professional habits are of important matter to manage and prevent stress efficiently. Those measures include: providing enough sleeping time; avoiding caffeine at least 5 hours before bedtime; regular dining; prevention of dehydration; proper physical loading; planning and providing enough time for rests; participation in

meditation courses and yoga, self-analysis, and possibility to contact friends and family. The second group of measures for preventing stress, is of professional kind. They include setting realistic goals, taking part in training courses that aim improving the communication with colleagues and searching for help. The third ones are those measures that are provided by the organization/or institution, which include providing a healthy working environment and encouraging good interpersonal relations between the crew members; providing and encouraging possibilities for trainings that concern the psycho-social welfare. The results of the tests for stress prevention clearly show that strategies on the individual level offer short-term solutions, whereas the approach of promoting health, provides a more effective and stable frame to cope with both the stress sources and symptoms, on the workplace. For that, the developed programs for coping with the stress need to be more comprehensive, and directed to the psycho-social and organizational stress sources on the workplace [24]. The key of dealing with stress within the sea is prevention, the early interference and preliminary training process. The program named “Wellness at sea” aims to correspond to both the reasons, and aftermath of the seamen’s bad mental health, and is directed to prevention, not treatment. The program views wellness as an integral concept, which is comprised of five specific welfare fields: social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual. The training, support and encouragement of seafarers’ well-being worldwide, can be provided by the ISWAN organization, which offers a multilingual telephone line for seafarers and their families who need help, 24 hours a day- Seafarer Help [25].

New wellbeing programme for seafarers launched. Nautilus International's latest strategic yacht partner and wellbeing specialist ZS Wellness has launched Actionable Individual Monitoring (AIM) - a holistic fitness and mental health wellbeing programme for those looking to improve their fitness while at sea [26].

The care of the mental well-being of the crew could be improved by providing support, trainings, awareness of using a program for the seamen’s health information (SHIP), and improvement of the working conditions, including dismissions on coast, variety of diets, team building activities, sports, a controlled Internet access, etc. Information brochure- Seafarer help, information program Steps to Positive Mental Health, <https://seafarerhelp.org/assets/downloads/Steps-to-Positive-Mental-Health-English.pdf> are accessible, what is needed is awareness of using them [20]. The program for health steadiness of Shell, is worked out to encourage the welfare of workers on and out of coast. This is a voluntary intervention for steadiness that includes 12 modules, based on positive psychology, cognitive-behavioral therapy, nervous-linguistic programming, and leadership exploring. The operative program for stress control of the American fleet, aims to help seamen cope with depression. One of the most common techniques used, is Three good things in life. The participants need to write three positive things every evening, and the reasons for them for a week. This method assists in increasing self-esteem, recovering from unfavorable situations and building steadiness [27].

A proven method for dealing with stress is applying techniques of the Nervous-linguistic programming (NLP). According to its founders, Richard Bandler and John Grinder, NLP is capable of dealing with problems such as phobias, depression, disorders, behavioral disorder, psycho-somatic diseases and other types of disorders. Their stated purpose is of finding ways to “help people lead a better, more adequate and wealthier life” [28].

NLP is based on the following props. The first of them is the nexus between oneself and the others. The second element are sentient perceptions, the third one is thinking of the outcome of a situation, and the fourth is behavioral flexibility [29]. Training of different techniques for self-help is needed. The pre-assembled technique of Anchoring for provoking of positively experienced feeling, and its remembrance, could be applied for a quick solution of a problem. The technique of Timeline is directed toward eliminating negative feelings and sense of dead-lock, and the automatic focus on positive and pleasant feelings [30].

M. Jezewska and staff call for training of seamen in psychological skills as a preventive measure of stress, having to do with communicative competences, which include solutions of interpersonal conflicts onboard, providing and getting support [31].

A proven method of intervention and self-help is keeping a diary, and expressing emotions the way they're felt, by writing them down in words. The positive effects of the method show us, that writing has a therapeutic effect that helps releasing of the gathered energy. Also, it gives opportunity to express each feeling and emotions in one's native language, without worrying of rebuke or negative esteem. Considering the lack of possibility for one to work with a psychologist due to the long months of navigation, this method is absolutely suitable.

Another fine method of mental help are Online interventions on psychology and web-based trainings.

3. Conclusion

The high value of stress imposes developing programs for stress prevention with both an individual and collective focus, which must be implied in both sectoral, and company level. The human factor and working conditions in navigation, have a high influence on the crew's safety. Despite the series of developed programs, conventions and measures of improving the working conditions, and well-being of the crews onboard, the data of the last few years show us that the psycho-social problems, are not yet resolved and many of the seafarers need support, and psycho-social help. The multiple suicides among young seafarers, confirms the necessity of real and adequate measures. It's proven that one seeks no psychological help because of feeling ashamed, or fearing mockery and irony by the other members of the crew. In this connections, it's necessary to change the attitude and mindsets of long-time seafarers, by destroying negative practices and relations, that are enforced for years and taken for granted. The current destructive stereotypes and rough manly environment, do not always make strong and stable men out of the crew, on the contrary, this very often makes the environment even more dangerous, stressful and hostile.

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