

A Study on Physiological and Psychological Factors Causing Stress in Seafarers

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Abstract: Stress is considered to be the response to a happening or situation. It is part of a normal process of adaptation to an environment and is based on adaptive behavioural responses. It is commonly considered as the result of a relationship with the environment that an individual appraises as noteworthy for his or her welfare. Exposure to a new environment subjects to stress which may be of physical, social, or environmental. Stress in seafarers is due to their physiological and psychological factors around them in a new environment called as Ship. Working on ships is a 'team effort' and it can never be a 'one-man-show' on the ship. In order to perform, and for the smooth functioning of ship operations on board ships, good interpersonal relationship among seafarers remains as a compulsory factor. As the number of seamen on board ships is limited, there is a high probability of ego clash and dissatisfaction among crew members. Working onboard ships is not an easy task. As the seamen are away from home and their normal social life, they are forced to follow monotonous routines under harsh working conditions. One another important factor which causes Stress is that the maximum number of shipping companies employs multinational crew onboard, which brings along its own set of problems which creates language barrier; group formation etc. and also they have reduced the number of crews' considerably onboard ship. Thus it paves way for Stress and remains as the basic factor that leads to both physical and psychological stress among seamen.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Stress is considered to be the response to a happening or situation. It is a part of normal process of adaptation to an environment and is based on adaptive behavioural responses. It is commonly considered as the result of a relationship with the environment that an individual appraises as noteworthy for his or her welfare. Exposure to a new environment subjects to stress which may be of physical, social, or environmental. Stress in seafarers is due to their physiological and psychological factors around them in a new environment called as Ship. Working on ships is a 'team effort' and it can never be a 'one-man-show' on the ship. In order to perform, and for the smooth functioning of ship operations on board ships, good interpersonal relationship among seafarers remains as a compulsory factor. As the number of seamen on board ships is limited, there is a high probability of ego clash and dissatisfaction among crew members. Working onboard ships is not an easy task.

2. PHYSIOLOGICAL AND PSHYCOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF SEAFARERS:

As the seamen are away from home and their normal social life, they are forced to follow monotonous routines under harsh working conditions. One another important factor which

causes Stress is that the maximum number of shipping companies employs multinational crew onboard, which brings along its own set of problems which creates language barrier; group formation etc. and also they have reduced the number of crews' considerably onboard ship. Thus it paves way for Stress and remains as the basic factor that leads to both physical and psychological stress among seamen. As a result of Physical and Psychological stress caused among crew members they lose

- Lack of interest in work
- Lack of motivation
- Develop Short temper
- Carelessness while doing work
- They Incline to take short cuts to finish work
- Frustration
- Lack of seriousness in their duties and on on-board safety
- Blaming others for mistakes.

3. MAIN FACTORS FOR THE CAUSE OF STRESS IN SEAFERS:

- Shortage of man power because of less crew members
- Frequent calling at port (Duties at port require most physical efforts and long working hours)
- Personal or family problems
- Long working hours
- Homesick.

- Not being relieved on time by the company
- Work pressure
- Unfriendly working environment
- Differences of opinion and conflicts with colleagues
- Unavailability of necessary provisions
- Dissatisfied with company policy
- Dissatisfied with quality of food
- Rejected from promotion, salary or leave
- Dissatisfied with facilities provided on board e.g. entertainment facilities
- Sleeping disturbances
- Isolated behaviour and neglecting interaction with crew member.
- Refusal to follow instructions
- Carelessness towards duties.
- The proverb “Health is Wealth” may sound a bit cliché in the first place, but the challenges that Seafarers face on board ship makes one understand the importance of good health while working in rough environment on ships.
- While the term ‘wellness’ is gaining popularity these days, wellness simply means being physically, emotionally, and spiritually normal at all times.

4. MAIN SYMPTOMS OF STRESS AT SEA:

The ILO MLC, 2006 has addressed a lot of stressful factors affecting seafarers’ wellbeing. The common symptoms are:

- Deprivation of sleep
- Sweating
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty concentrating
- Headaches
- Muscle tension or pain
- Dizziness
- Chest pain and rapid heartbeat
- Frequent colds
- Upset stomach
- Breathlessness
- Dry mouth
- Anxiety
- Moodiness
- Feeling low
- Worrying constantly
- Imagining the worst
- Losing temper easily
- Drinking or smoking excessively
- Nail biting.

5. EFFECTS OF STRESS IN SEAFARERS:

In order to have a temporary relief from Stress, Seafarers are often seen resorting to alcoholism and smoking in spite of company policies prohibiting use of such elements. Prolonged stage of frustration and stress are extremely harmful to both physical and mental health of seafarers. Psychological stress can lead to the following effects:

- Repetition of same mistakes
- Reduced work efficiency

6. HOW TO AVOID STRESS IN MARINE LIFE:

Seamen must take proper, balanced and healthier Food, which includes Fruits, vegetables, meat, and fish. Always must choose white meat over red meat and it should be taken grilled, roasted or steamed rather than fried, because of the saturated fats contained in oil. However, it depends on the Chief Cook on board to prepare a healthier meal. Eating boiled eggs is good for seamen. Egg-whites contain zero cholesterol. While eating breads choose wheat bread over white one because it has a low glycemic index. When brown rice is not available, reduce the intake of white for a better glucose control. Breakfast should never be skipped off. That is the most important meal of the day. ‘Oatmeal’ is a good meal to manage blood Cholesterol levels. As much as possible, it is better to avoid salty food to maintain blood pressure. Sodium triggers fluctuation in blood pressure. It’s a general opinion that only children alone must drink milk .Every Seamen must take two glasses of milk every day.

Taking a Walk or Jog:

An early morning or evening brisk walk or jog for 30-40 minutes around the ship in good weather can create wonders.

Swimming:

Some of the commercial vessels are fitted with swimming pools. Swimming is the best form of exercise for a Seaman to get relieved from stress.

Fitness Centre and Gymnasium

Outdoor activities may not be possible for a seaman onboard; instead seaman must use the gym equipment available onboard ship for at least thirty (30) to forty (40) minutes. Sweat out to burn extra calories and push out the toxins from the body through sweat.

Engage in some Sports

Though Ship is a tough place to work, some of the vessels have extra spaces that can be used for outdoor sports. It is also a good way to develop a good relationship or bond with your colleagues, and helps to frame teamwork. Playing table tennis can also provide good exercise.

Detoxify Daily

As a rule of thumb, every Seaman should take or drink at least eight (8) glasses of water daily. Food must be chewed well while eating for easier digestion and to avoid constipation. Body must be cleansed minimum of at least once in a day. When bodies have an overload of toxins, the important Organ, liver weakens and can no longer function properly, and needs immediate cleaning. The toxins that cling to the intestinal walls can weaken our body cells and impair its proper functioning that leads to the development of various body ailments and poor health.

Limit the Intake of Soft Drinks or Carbonated Drinks

- Cola contains caffeine
- Carbonated drinks use carbonic acid.
- A small percentage of Phosphoric and citric acid present in these soft drinks might irritate the gastric glands, when taken on empty stomach.
- Moreover, the loads of calories in them increases body weight.
- Avoid carbonated drinks as much as possible.

Stay Connected

Try to stay connected with the family or friends as the lines of communications are open now at a large scale. With the advent of modern technology, keeping in touch with the families and networks of friends is not a tough task. Sharing and talking with the loved ones acts like a stress buster.

Do Yoga As An Exercise

- Yoga is a term for a range of traditional system of physical exercise

- Meditation.
- Hatha Yoga for therapeutic purposes, modified versions of the physical exercises has become popular as a kind of low-impact physical exercise.
- Yoga has been proved and acts as a Stress reliever of both physical and mental aspects of the body.

Have a Positive Attitude

- Be adaptable.
- Be an open – minded person to change and welcome innovations.
- Change is the only thing that is constant, so try to keep abreast with the latest developments in technology that helps to fuel the brain.
- In teamwork, be open to ideas.
- Have a positive attitude while on board ship.

Don't Forget to Pray

- Being spiritual has its own benefits
- It helps to keep the mind calm.
- Praying is scientifically proved to have positive effects on life, on both body and soul.
- Praying is definitely the best way to start and end a day without Stress.

Always Keep A Happy Disposition

Happiness depends on the choices of what a person makes. Regardless of what has transpired during the whole day, need not frown or fret. Seamen should never let unfavourable situations, thoughts or things to nurture the mind. Keep a smile in face always and it will reflect on others faces too. This would create wonders especially at workplace which is filled with Stress especially on ships where each one has to deal with the same faces every day.

7. CONCLUSION:

Seafaring is really a tough task and at sea, there are many potential stressors, and these need to be recognised and managed properly. These Stressors come in different forms; they can be individual causes or organisational causes. It is observed that an individual must perceive a stressor in order to have an effect, if there is no perceived threat, and then the person can happily be relieved from all the factors. A shy person undergoes more stress than an outgoing person. An organised and experienced person may be

able to understand the issue and deal with it thus it can be said Stress can be fought out by every individual.

Organisational Stress plays an important role at sea and every seaman is prone to it and the Stress is created onboard by the environment, culture, demands, systems and management. Besides these aspects, as the stressful conditions lead to unhealthy lifestyles, Specific strategies should also be directed to the different categories of seafarers to overcome Stress. If the above mentioned Stress relieving factors are followed by Seamen then there can be a true improvement in the psychological health of workers. Future perspectives might include a system of counseling and support at a distance, and through the web, to make the tough working environment 'Ship' a better one which would really be an opportunity to expose feelings and emotions in an environment far from job activities. Seafarers could make use of this 'web counseling' with psychologist to reduce Stress factors previously indicated by them, such as eating disorders and loneliness, to improve social skills, quality of life, self-esteem, problem solving, and appropriate expression of emotions.

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