IDEAS FOR IMPROVING SEAFARERS’ MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

PROFESSOR HELEN SAMPSON

NEIL ELLIS
LITERATURE

• IT IS DIFFICULT TO ESTABLISH THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM OF MENTAL ILL-HEALTH (AND SUICIDE) AMONGST SEAFARERS RELATIVE TO COMPARABLE POPULATIONS.

• THERE IS EVIDENCE OF AN INCREASE IN RECENT-ONSET ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AMONGST SERVING SEAFARERS (SAMPSON ET AL 2017).

• THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT IN SOME ROLES (E.G. GALLEY STAFF) SEAFARERS MAY BE PARTICULARLY PRONE TO EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AND ‘BURNOUT’ (OLDENBURG ET AL 2013)
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• ARE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONGST SEAFARERS CONSIDERED TO BE A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM BY KEY STAKEHOLDERS WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL CARGO SHIPPING INDUSTRY?

• WHAT FACTORS AND FEATURES OF LIFE ON CARGO VESSELS DO SEAFARERS IDENTIFY AS SUPPORTING AND/OR UNDERMINING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING?

• WHAT POLICIES AND PRACTICES COULD BE IMPLEMENTED BY SHIP OPERATORS AND/OR WELFARE BODIES TO PROVIDE BETTER SUPPORT FOR THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF SEAFARERS?
METHOD

• LITERATURE REVIEW.

• QUESTIONNAIRE WAS SENT TO A RANDOMLY GENERATED SAMPLE OF HR MANAGERS (43) WORKING IN SHIP OPERATING COMPANIES.

• AN INTERVIEWER-ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE WAS EMPLOYED WITH A LARGE SAMPLE OF SEAFARERS (1,507)

• INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED WITH EMPLOYERS (5), SEAFARERS (5), MARITIME CHARITIES AND STAKEHOLDER ORGANISATIONS (5).

• 15 INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED WITH 11 P&I CLUBS.

• ANALYSIS OF DATA PROVIDED BY P&I CLUBS.
CONFLICTING VIEWS AND EVIDENCE

- Mental health and welfare is identified by maritime charities, P&I clubs and stakeholder organisations as an important issue.
- Employers do not recognise the importance of mental health and welfare on board to the same extent as maritime charities and stakeholders.
- Employer records and records obtained from P&I clubs do not provide evidence of an increasing problem of repatriations as a result of mental ill-health or of suicides amongst seafarers.
OUR RESEARCH EVIDENCE

• IN THIS RESEARCH SEAFARERS REPORTED BEING SIGNIFICANTLY HAPPIER AT HOME THAN AT SEA.
  • AT SEA ONLY 66.9% REPORTED BEING HAPPY OR VERY HAPPY COMPARED WITH 92.8% ASHORE.

BETWEEN PRESSURE, WORKLOAD, NO DAYS OFF AND YOU ARE A GAZILLION MILES AWAY FROM HOME WITH LIMITED COMMUNICATION, WHAT DO YOU THINK IS GOING TO HAPPEN? (SEAFARER 5)
SEAFARERS WERE ALSO LONELY AT SEA

- JUST 4.2% OF SEAFARERS DESCRIBED THEMSELVES AS EITHER ALWAYS LONELY OR OFTEN LONELY AT HOME.
- A SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF SEAFARERS DESCRIBED THEMSELVES AS ALWAYS OR VERY OFTEN LONELY AT SEA (20.2%).

THREE MONTHS ON LAND IS NOTHING. YOU CAN’T SEE YOUR KIDS GROW UP, YOU CAN’T SEE ANYTHING. YOU ARE JUST LIKE AN UNCLE COMING AND GOING. (SEAFARER 2)
THINGS THAT MADE SEAFARERS HAPPY ON BOARD

- Leaving the ship to go home: 98.8%
- Talking with colleagues: 98.7%
- Texting my friends and family: 98.6%
- Watching film/DVD: 98.4%
- Working: 97.3%
- Eating meals: 95.9%
- Playing games with colleagues: 95.8%
- Emailing my friends and family: 95.0%
- Reading: 91.4%
- Swimming in the pool: 88.9%
- Watching satellite TV: 84.9%
- Working out in the gym: 82.8%
- Karaoke: 82.0%
- Drinking alcohol: 81.3%
- Going ashore with colleagues/shore leave: 79.0%
- Video calling (e.g. SKYPE) with my friends and family: 75.2%
THINGS THAT SEAFARERS COULD ACCESS ON CURRENT SHIP

Email: 85.5%
Good (tasty) food: 85.4%
A gym: 84.8%
DVD library: 77.7%
Internet: 70.8%
Sports equipment: 68.7%
Karaoke: 68.4%
Card games: 65.3%
Book library: 61.9%
Alcohol: 42.1%
Swimming pool: 35.4%
Satellite TV: 33.5%
THINGS THAT MADE SEAFARERS DOWN

• WHEN THEY WERE EXPERIENCED, FAMILY-RELATED PROBLEMS CAUSED MOST SEAFARERS TO FEEL DOWN/DEPRESSED ON BOARD.

• SHIP-SPECIFIC FACTORS CAUSED SEAFARERS TO FEEL DOWN E.G. TOO MUCH WORK, BEING UNABLE TO TAKE SHORE LEAVE, AND POOR FOOD.

• CREW-RELATED FACTORS CAUSED SEAFARERS TO FEEL DOWN E.G. A ‘BOSSY CAPTAIN’, EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION, BEING BLAMED FOR THINGS, AND FALLING OUT WITH SUPERIORS/OTHER COLLEAGUES.

• GETTING TIRED.

• BOREDOM.
STRATEGIES TO COMBAT DEPRESSION

• SEAFARERS IDENTIFIED THE PROVISION OF FREE INTERNET ACCESS AS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION WHICH COULD BE MADE BY EMPLOYERS TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH/WELLBEING

• THEY ALSO IDENTIFIED: TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF WORK, WAYS OF IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS ON BOARD, PHYSICAL HEALTH, ACCOMMODATION AND RECREATION.
CONCLUSION

• STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH NEED TO BE ORIENTATED TOWARDS **PROACTIVE SHIPBOARD IMPROVEMENTS** DESIGNED TO STIMULATE POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTION (WITH THOSE ON BOARD AND THOSE ASHORE) AND TO IMPROVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SEAFARERS TO RELAX, RECHARGE AND UPLIFT THEIR MOOD.

• IMPROVEMENTS IN **TERMS AND CONDITIONS** IN SUPPORT OF A GOOD WORK LIFE BALANCE FOR SEAFARERS ARE ALSO REQUIRED.
SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

• **FREE AND UNLIMITED INTERNET** SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO ALL SEAFARERS ON BOARD ALL CARGO VESSELS.

• A VARIED MENU OF **INTERACTIVE RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES** SHOULD BE AVAILABLE TO SEAFARERS ON BOARD.

  - AS A MINIMUM **ONE OF** THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE FACILITATED ON BOARD: BASKETBALL; SQUASH; SWIMMING.

  - IN ADDITION, A MINIMUM OF **FOUR OF** THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE FACILITATED ON BOARD: TABLE TENNIS; DARTS; BARBECUES; KARAOKE; CARD AND BOARD GAMES; BINGO (WITH PRIZES).
A VARIED MENU OF SOLITARY RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE AVAILABLE TO SEAFARERS ON BOARD

• A DEDICATED GYMNASIUM WITH THREE DIFFERENT PIECES OF EQUIPMENT SHOULD BE PROVIDED (AND PROPERLY MAINTAINED) ON ALL SHIPS.

• A MINIMUM OF TWO OF THE FOLLOWING SHOULD ALSO BE PROVIDED: A SAUNA; A BOOK AND DVD LIBRARY; SATELLITE TV WITHIN CABINS; A LIBRARY OF INTERACTIVE VIDEO GAMES.
• **COMFORTABLE MATTRESSES** AND FURNISHINGS WITHIN CABINS SHOULD BE PRIORITISED TO FACILITATE REST AND SLEEP.

• **SHORE LEAVE** SHOULD BE PROVIDED AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY AND FOR ALL RANKS.

• **VARIED, GOOD QUALITY FOOD** SHOULD BE PROVIDED ON BOARD AND A FEEDING RATE OF AT LEAST US$11.00 PER PERSON SHOULD BE ALLOCATED TO EACH VESSEL.
  
  • GOOD FOOD LET'S START WITH THAT […] GOOD FOOD REALLY DOES DO SOMETHING. YOU START LOOKING FORWARD TO MEALS. (SEAFARER 5)
  
  • THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON ON THE VESSEL IS THE COOK, YOU KNOW IF THERE'S GOOD FOOD MOST PEOPLE ARE HAPPY. (SEAFARER 1)
• Contracts should balance work and leave time for all ranks in a ratio which is not worse than 2:1 and with an upper limit of a maximum of 6 months on board.

• Anti-bullying and harassment policies should be introduced/enforced.

• Officers should receive training in creating a positive atmosphere on board including via the provision of positive feedback on work, when appropriate, and respectful interactions with subordinates.

• Self-help guidance on improving mental resilience should be provided to all seafarers.

• Confidential counselling services should be made available to seafarers.