

“Feeling blues” at the sea and its impact on the crew claims

Maritime is one of the most demanding professions in the world. Apart from the difficulties of unexpected events that may be encountered during the sea adventure, the psychological disorders caused by the working conditions that require seafarers to be isolated from social life and their loved ones for months are also among the reasons why maritime is not easy.



As the Turkish P&I claims team, we witness that the effects of the changes in the psychological state of the crew working under difficult conditions on personnel-sourced claims are at a substantial level. In vessels, which are the workplace of the seafarer, deterioration in mental health; causes undesirable results due to lack of attention, inadequate performance, inability to do the job, disappearance for a long time, being prone to sudden outbursts, irregular behaviors and temper tantrums. Increasing competition, stress and workload also increases the human factor in accidents together with the acceleration of operational processes and shortening periods of port stays. For instance, accident statistics on cargo ships show that 80% of marine accidents are caused by human. (Muslu, 2020). Only human-related accidents cost the shipping industry approximately \$541 million annually (Etman and Halawa, 2007).

According to the data of “The Mental Health of Seafarers International Maritime Health”, seafarer suicides have increased over the recent years.

In addition, depression, anxiety, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger control problems, alcohol addiction, substance abuse, impulsivity, obsessions, suicidal thoughts and actions have increased. The Covid 19 also had a negative impact on the psychological state of seafarers. The 14-day quarantine period, the problems experienced in the supply chains etc., the delays in crew change plans, the inability to carry out the planned practical trainings and certifications, the crew having to work on the vessel for long periods without breaks can be given as examples. According to The International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), which is a charity working for the welfare of seafarers around the world, the number of seafarers calling for help has increased significantly in the last 4 years. For all these reasons, it is crucial to support the mental



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health of crew and to proceed with preventive programs.

In the light of the above developments, a new field of psychology, i.e. "Maritime Psychology", has started to be given more importance in international organizations such as IMO and EMSA who tend to work more within this frame. Being amongst the most tangible steps for protection of seaman, The MLC Convention (The Maritime Labor Convention, 2006 (MLC, 2006) not only enforced regulations regarding the labor rights, but also contained many sections to improve their working conditions, and the well-being .

Maritime Psychology is a discipline that examines individuals working in the maritime industry as well as the impact of the marine environment on its employees. The specific professionalism of this field is coping effectively with the physical and psychological stress factors specific to the maritime field, placement and development of human resources with scientific methods, reducing the risks of human-induced accidents and deaths at sea, supporting the psychological well-being of the crew, reducing costs and managing risks. One of its primary goals is to make the ship environment more peaceful and to ensure that seafarers work in sustainable conditions.

In this context, a company called "Marine Mental Management" was founded by Turkish psychologists and seafarers in our country which provides abovementioned maritime psychology services. During the recruitment process, the company provides candidates with psychological evaluations through tests and interviews to assess whether the candidate was suitable for the company, the position and the common challenges in the maritime business.

In addition, trainings such as anger management, effective leadership, crisis management, psychological first aid are provided to the crew by psychologists. Another service being rendered is interim psychological health checks of the crew during the contract period which would be followed by a psychotherapy support in case of need, provided by psychologists and psychiatrists.

As Turk P&I, we attach a special importance to preventive measures and therefore through this article, we intended to bring the aforementioned company to the attention of our readers, as a recommendation.

We wish everyone safe voyage.

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