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Abstract

Seafarers' Health and Wellbeing during COVID-19: Lessons Learned †

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Abstract: The maritime industry has long been a significant mode of transportation. It is essential since it contributes to 80% of the global trade. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the maritime sector and its workforce. Many countries implemented strict prevention measures like the No Sail Order, the closing of ports and movement restrictions. The study explored the potential effects of the COVID-19 restrictions on the health and well-being of seafarers with an aim to offer insight for policy recommendations. The study was cross-sectional. It took place during the period January–April 2021. The questionnaire developed by Stella Maris was used with permission. It was distributed to shipping companies and work unions and, through them, to seafarers. The sample was 106 individuals. The study features the findings of the questionnaire which were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics. SPSS was used for the analysis. Chi-square test and Fisher's exact test were performed. Logistic regression was used to assess the impact of COVID-19 on physical, mental and financial aspects of seafarers' lives. Multivariate logistic regression analysis was performed using the forward (conditional) stepwise regression method with probability for stepwise entry set at 10%. Statistical significance was considered at $p < 0.05$. Seafarers were affected physically (38%), mentally (53%), and financially (40%) by the pandemic. The country of origin, the time onboard and the number of supportive family members had an influence on those effects. Among the participants, those who worked on tankers and officers with more than three family members were more likely to face mental, physical or financial problems. In addition, the study showed that only 24.5% of the respondents were on regular contracts, 16% had their contracts extended, 14.2% were about to be deployed but were grounded due to the pandemic, while about half of the sample 41.5% was waiting for a new contract. The results of this study may be used as a starting point by International Organisations including IMO and ILO, flag states, ports and the industry to increase emergency preparedness and to inform outbreak response plans in the event of future infectious disease outbreaks in the shipping domain.

Keywords: physical health; psychological health; contracts; grounded; shipping; emergency preparedness; infectious diseases

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