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**SAFEGUARDING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF SEAFARERS
EXPLORING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY, BURNOUT, SUICIDE PREVENTION, AND
HOLISTIC PRACTICES AT SEA**

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Executive Summary

The mental health of seafarers is becoming a central concern within the maritime industry due to the unique and often harsh conditions of life at sea. Long working hours, extended contracts, social isolation and separation from family contribute to high levels of stress, fatigue, depression, and anxiety among crew members. These issues not only compromise the personal well-being of individuals but also affect operational safety and shipboard performance. International organizations such as the IMO and ILO have begun taking action, with recent amendments to training standards, anti-harassment policies, and renewed discussions around updating the Maritime Labour Convention to include mental health provisions. However, the persistence of stigma, inconsistent support, and structural barriers shows that more comprehensive strategies are urgently required.

1. Yoga and Asanas

Incorporating yoga and asanas into seafarer well-being programs provides significant benefits for resilience, mental health, and burnout prevention. Yoga's physical postures relieve muscle tension and improve flexibility, while meditation and breathing exercises, like *pranayama*, enhance mental clarity, reduce anxiety, and promote emotional balance. These practices help seafarers manage stress and develop resilience, improving their ability to cope with the challenges of isolation and long hours at sea. Regular yoga sessions offer a natural cure for burnout by fostering relaxation, enhancing sleep quality, and providing a mental reset. The combination of physical movement, mindfulness, and meditation strengthens mental health, preventing the buildup of stress and fatigue. Integrating yoga into daily routines onboard can create a more supportive, emotionally resilient workforce, enhancing both individual well-being and overall operational safety.

2. Mental Health and Survey

This study examined the mental health challenges faced by active and former seafarers through a quantitative, cross-sectional survey distributed via maritime networks, alumni associations, and shipping companies. The survey explored multiple domains of seafarer well-being, including burnout and resilience, psychological safety, gender sensitization and overall mental health. Participants rated their experiences on a five-point scale, providing valuable insights into the prevalence of stress, depression, anxiety, and isolation across different age groups and ranks. Younger officers highlighted struggles with adjustment and career insecurity, while older, more experienced seafarers reflected on cumulative fatigue and the long-term strain of decades spent at sea.

3. Proposals

3.1 Psychological Screening Before Deployment

Based on these findings, several proposals have been developed to address the urgent gaps in mental health support. First, it is recommended that all seafarers undergo psychological screening prior to deployment. This would involve psychometric testing 3 – 4 months before joining a vessel to assess resilience, stress tolerance, and coping mechanisms. By identifying vulnerable individuals early, companies can provide counselling or stress management training before deployment, thereby reducing the likelihood of breakdowns at sea. Such screenings would also generate valuable data for industry – wide mental health research and improve long – term manning practices.

3.2 Enforcing Zero-Tolerance Against Harassment

Another pressing issue is harassment and abuse at sea, which continues to affect psychological safety despite existing policies. To address this, the report proposes enforcing a strict zero – tolerance approach, where offenders are held accountable regardless of rank. This system must be supported by anonymous reporting mechanisms, ensuring that crew members can raise concerns without fear of retaliation or damage to their careers. Such a framework not only strengthens trust and inclusivity onboard but also generates anonymized data that can reveal patterns of misconduct, enabling targeted reforms.

3.3 Establishing Executive Lounges at Ports for Seafarers

Beyond onboard measures, the study highlights the need for shore – based support systems. It recommends the establishment of executive – style lounges for seafarers at major international ports. These spaces would provide rest facilities, communication access, wellness amenities, and opportunities to reconnect with loved ones. Such initiatives are designed to reduce the feelings of isolation and offer a critical psychological reset before returning to duty. By investing in these facilities, the industry can signal its commitment to valuing the mental and emotional needs of its frontline workforce.

3.4 Regular Onboard Mental Health Checks & Monitoring

The final proposal emphasizes the importance of routine mental health monitoring. Regular online consultations with qualified professionals, supplemented by anonymous surveys, would allow companies to detect early warning signs and intervene before issues escalate. Normalizing these check-ups ensures that mental health is treated with the seriousness as physical health. The data collected through these initiatives would also contribute to global research efforts, creating a more robust framework for seafarer well-being.

4. Annexure

The survey covered demographics and psychometric items across four domains: Burnout and Resilience, Gender Sensitization, Psychological Safety, and Mental Health and Wellbeing.

The proposals have taken the survey into consideration, outlining – screening, rotation, anti – harassment enforcement, shore – based support, and routine monitoring – offer a holistic framework that addresses both immediate and long – term needs.

The survey provides detailed evidence supporting these proposals. Results reveal that depression, anxiety, and fatigue remain common experiences among seafarers, with many reporting difficulties in maintaining work-life balance and frequent feelings of isolation. Although some progress has been made in promoting psychological safety, significant portions of the workforce still feel insecure about reporting incidents. Similarly, while inclusivity is improving, perceptions of gender bias and favoritism persist in diverse crews. Another key finding is the limited awareness of available mental health resources, reflecting the need for stronger communication and consistent support across vessels.

Taken together, the findings underscore that mental health challenges in the maritime industry cannot be addressed through isolated measures. They require structural reforms, cultural change, and educational initiatives that reinforce the importance of resilience, inclusivity, and psychological safety.

5. Conclusion

The mental health and well-being of seafarers must be recognized as a cornerstone of maritime safety and sustainability. Regulatory frameworks are evolving, but meaningful change will depend on proactive adoption of supportive practices at both organizational and shipboard levels. By prioritizing mental health as strongly as technical competency, the maritime industry can foster a safer, more resilient, and inclusive environment for seafarers worldwide.

In addition to structural reforms, the inclusion of holistic wellness practices such as yoga and asanas offers a powerful, low-cost tool to support mental health. Yoga not only helps reduce stress, anxiety, and fatigue, but also strengthens emotional resilience and promotes better sleep and mindfulness. Simple practices like breathing exercises and guided meditation can be easily implemented onboard, providing seafarers with practical strategies to manage burnout and maintain inner balance. By embracing yoga as part of a broader mental health framework, the industry can further enhance the long-term well-being of its workforce.

- 6.** The subcommittee is requested to consider our proposals in this document as mentioned in paragraph 3.