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Safeguarding Seafarer Mental Health, Well-being and Dignity

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TEAM- F10

SUMMARY

Executive summary: Based on the methodology established by HTW 10 and endorsed by MSC 108, this document identifies critical gaps in addressing seafarers' mental health and well-being and proposes a structured two-phase framework for reform.

Phase 1 introduces mandatory STCW courses

Phase 2 links these courses to certification levels

This framework ensures that mental health competence becomes a core requirement within the STCW system, promoting a proactive, safe, and resilient maritime workforce.

Strategic direction, if applicable: 9,10,11,12

Output: 10,12

Action to be taken: Paragraph 14

Related documents: STCW code MSC 108 (A-VI/1-4) , HTW 11/WP.4 , IMO Model course 1.28-MH , MSC/Circ.1014

BACKGROUND

1. The comprehensive review of the STCW 1978 Convention and Code has recognized mental health and psychological well-being as critical areas requiring immediate attention within the maritime industry. HTW 11/WP.4 emphasized that seafarers must possess "appropriate competence to understand the impact of living and working at sea and to recognize and triage mental health challenges.

2. While NGOs and welfare organizations have made notable contributions through 24/7 helplines, port welfare centres, and tele-counselling services. These NGOs have also demonstrated effective training delivery, counselling outreach, and cross-cultural competence, positioning them as essential partners for implementing structured mental health programs under STCW.”
3. These initiatives largely operate voluntarily and lack integration within regulatory frameworks. Their success demonstrates the feasibility of formalizing structured mental health support within maritime training and company operations. The current STCW provisions, particularly Section A-VI/1-4, provide insufficient preparation for recognizing and managing psychological stressors at sea.

DISCUSSION

4. Mental health challenges among seafarers continue to impact safety, efficiency, and retention across the maritime industry. While the STCW Convention emphasizes technical competence, it lacks structured training for psychological resilience and emotional well-being. Current measures remain reactive and inconsistent, often relying on voluntary company or NGO initiatives.
5. To bridge these gaps, this paper proposes a two-phase framework aligned with the STCW comprehensive review.

5.1. Phase 1–Training Reform under STCW

Three mandatory courses-

- Basic Mental Health Awareness Programs
- Stress and Fatigue Management
- Diversity, Harassment Prevention and Respectful Workplace Behaviour.

5.2.Phase 2 – Progressive Implementation through Certification

This phase integrates mental health training into professional progression

- Level 1- mandatory for CDC issuance
- Level 2- mandatory for sailing as chief officer/chief engineer.

6. These are introduced to ensure all ranks acquire mental health competence. These. courses build awareness, empathy, and crisis management skills through theory, practical assessment, and e-learning modules.
7. By embedding these structured courses into the certification process, mental health competence becomes a mandatory and measurable part of maritime professionalism creating a safer, healthier, and more resilient global seafaring community. Partnerships with NGOs and welfare bodies can enhance course delivery, particularly in mental health awareness, counseling skills, and peer-support training, drawing on their field experience with seafarers worldwide.
8. The objectives are to equip all seafarers with basic recognition and supportive skills and ensure senior officers possess demonstrable leadership and clinical-aware competencies required to manage crew welfare.

PROPOSAL

9. To effectively strengthen seafarer mental health competence and ensure lasting cultural change, the proposal is structured into two implementation phases. Each phase complements the other by combining education, professional accountability, and certification-based progression.
10. Phase 1 – Foundational Education and Awareness- This phase establishes a mandatory and entry-level competency in seafarer mental health by introducing a STCW approved above courses into the curricula of accredited maritime training institutions. Delivered through classroom instruction, practical workshops, role-play and scenario-based assessments, the course combines evidence-based theory with applied exercises to ensure both knowledge and skill acquisition.
11. Implementation will follow a staged approach: (a) curriculum development by maritime educators and clinical mental-health specialists; (b) approval and accreditation of providers by flag state authorities; (c) instructor ‘train-the-trainer’ programs to ensure pedagogic and clinical competence; (d) mandatory end-of-course assessment with record in national STCW registers; and (e) integration of course completion as a pre-requisite for issuance of the Continuous Discharge Certificate (CDC). This will create a strong foundation of empathy and understanding before entering shipboard life.
12. Phase 2 - Professional Certification and Advanced Competence: This phase builds upon foundational training by introducing mental health certification to ensure officers demonstrate competence in psychosocial leadership, crisis management, and crew welfare before assuming senior command roles.
 - 12.1. Level 1 — Advanced Training: Conducted by approved institutes, this course focuses on advanced mental health leadership, emotional regulation, crisis intervention, and team management. Delivered through in-person practical.
 - 12.2. Level 2 — Exit Examination and Certification: Following Level 1, candidates undergo final evaluation by recognized authorities through case-based exams, simulated scenarios, and oral assessments to test real-world decision-making and leadership. Successful completion grants a Mental Health Competence Certification, required for appointment as Second Engineer or Second Officer.
13. NGO Collaboration: Leverage NGOs and welfare organizations as approved delivery partners, resource developers, and trainers for Phase 1 and Phase 2 courses, ensuring cultural sensitivity and practical insight from frontline experience.
14. **Action requested of the Sub-Committee**
 - 14.1. Curriculum Development: Define learning outcomes for Phase 1 courses and the advanced Phase 2 modules in collaboration with maritime psychologists and training experts.
 - 14.2. Regulatory Adoption: Amend national STCW Codes to include mental health training within required certification and promotion pathways.
 - 14.3. Accreditation and Delivery: Approve and audit training providers to ensure instructor quality, consistency, and course compliance with IMO standards.

- 14.4. Examination & Certification: Introduce official assessments and maintain certification records within the STCW database for verification by flag administrations.