

# Institutionalization of Indian Seafarers' Well-being and Mental Health: Challenges and Solutions

By Capt Gajanan Karanjikar

Head- Seafarers' RIGHTS committee, President AIMPA, MD- Cordelia Marine Services



Capt. Gajanan Karanjikar

## Introduction

The maritime industry plays a vital role in global trade and commerce, with seafarers serving as the backbone of this industry. India, with its vast coastline and maritime heritage, has a significant presence in the international maritime sector. However, the well-being and mental health of Indian seafarers have long been overshadowed by the demands and challenges of their profession. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need to address these issues through institutionalized efforts.

This article explores the challenges faced by Indian seafarers in terms of well-being and mental health, the importance of institutionalization, and potential solutions to ensure their overall welfare is taken care of effectively and not for the name's sake.

## Challenges Faced by Indian Seafarers

Indian seafarers operate in a unique and demanding environment that often takes a toll on their mental health and overall well-being. In today's day and age seafarers are also exposed to technology which is not proving to be useful to them when working alone. For example, onboard internet access- which keeps them updated with news on a constant basis. This means that they are exposed to the unwanted news too which is proving

to cause more disturbance to them than helping them keep cohesivity of work on board.

Some of the key challenges they face include:

### Isolation and Loneliness:

Seafarers often spend extended periods away from their families and social support networks, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Prolonged isolation can contribute to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues.

### Work-Related Stress:

The maritime industry is highly demanding, with seafarers facing long working hours, physical labor, and the need to stay vigilant around the clock. The pressure to meet deadlines and ensure the safety of the vessel can result in stress and exhaustion.

### Cultural and Language Barriers:

Indian seafarers work on international ships, which exposes them to diverse cultures and languages. Navigating these differences can be challenging and can lead to misunderstandings and feelings of exclusion.

### Limited Access to Mental Health Services:

While at sea, seafarers often have limited access to medical and mental health services. This lack of support can exacerbate existing mental health issues and prevent timely intervention.

### Importance of Institutionalization

Institutionalization of seafarers' well-being and mental health initiatives is crucial to address the challenges they face. Here are some reasons why:

### Structured Support:

Institutionalization allows for the establishment of structured support systems that provide seafarers with access to resources, counseling services, and interventions. These systems can help seafarers manage stress, loneliness, and other mental health issues.

### Preventive Approach:

An institutionalized approach enables proactive measures to prevent mental health problems. Regular mental health check-ups, workshops on coping strategies, and stress management training can be incorporated into seafarers' routines.

### Awareness and Education:

Institutions can raise awareness about mental health issues within the maritime community. Education programs can help reduce the stigma associated with seeking help and encourage open conversations about well-being.

### Policy Implementation:

Institutionalization allows for the development and enforcement of policies that prioritize seafarers' mental health and well-being. These policies can cover aspects such as rest hours, workload management, and access to medical facilities. Use of the internet for important news like connection with families only.

### Solutions for Institutionalization

Institutionalizing seafarers' well-being and mental health involves a multi-faceted approach that requires collaboration between government bodies, maritime organizations, and mental

## CMMI Chennai Chapter.....From Page : 1

Later, Capt Suresh Amirapu, who was awarded the CMMI Founders Award for Lifetime Achievement was felicitated, along with visiting Capt Bhasin

Secretary-General and Capt Sasikumar CEO of CMMI Mumbai.

Formalities done, it was time to open the bar and the family gathering enjoyed the rest of the evening of fun and frolic.



health professionals. Here are some potential solutions:

### Mental Health Training:

Incorporate mental health awareness and coping skills training into the mandatory training programs for seafarers. This can empower them to recognize signs of distress in themselves and their peers and seek help when needed.

### Onboard Support:

Implement onboard counseling services provided by trained mental health professionals. These professionals can offer confidential support to seafarers who may be struggling with their mental health.

### Virtual Support Services:

Develop virtual platforms that provide seafarers with access to tele-counseling and virtual support groups while they are at sea. This can help bridge the gap in mental health services during their time away from home.

### Industry Collaboration:

Maritime organizations, unions, and shipping companies should collaborate to create industry-wide standards for seafarers' mental health. These standards can encompass working conditions, rest periods,

and mental health support services.

### Government Involvement:

Governments can play a pivotal role by implementing and enforcing policies that prioritize seafarers' well-being. This can include regulations on maximum working hours, mandatory mental health support, and inclusion of mental health facilities at ports.

### Conclusion

The institutionalization of Indian seafarers' well-being and mental health is an imperative step towards ensuring their overall welfare. By addressing the challenges they face through structured support systems, preventive measures, effective policy-making, and awareness campaigns, we can create a maritime industry that values and prioritizes the mental health of its workforce. Collaboration between various stakeholders, including government bodies, maritime organizations, and mental health professionals, is essential to bring about lasting change. Only by working together can we establish a safer and more supportive environment for Indian seafarers, enabling them to navigate the challenges of their profession while maintaining their mental well-being.