

Impact of COVID-19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

Ms. Juhi Chopra^{1*}, Dr. Poonam Devdutt²

ABSTRACT

During the spread of Pandemic people employed in different fields were working from home. But these ships were continuously moving and supplying essential items all over the world, during these tough times. The ships and people working on them continuously operated during the pandemic as the international trade and import and export of products otherwise would have come to standstill. This study was conducted to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the seafarers. This study aims to understand the impact of COVID-19 on Physical, Mental, Emotional and Spiritual aspects of life of these seafarers. The Questionnaire was prepared consisting of 30 statements. It is studying the Impact of COVID-19 on Physical, Mental, Spiritual and Personal life of people working in the Merchant Navy. 87 participants of all different ranks participated in this study. These participants were from different Ships and at different Ranks. Many expressed their concern for the health of their family members. The responses show that 64.4 percent of them suffer from anxiety or sad mood when they are not able to travel back home. 85.1 percent of them accept that travelling during Signing ON and Signing OFF cause severe concern to the family since Pandemic. Data show that 26.4 percent experience deterioration in their Interpersonal skills since March 2020. Further it was noted that 44.8 percent of them experienced relationship fluctuations. This study also shows that 46 percent saw an increase in the spiritual activities like listening to Bhajans, Mantras, Meditation etc. Further it shows that 27.6 percent of seafarers learnt new skills and 45 percent of seafarers experienced financial hardships since the Pandemic. This study shows that seafarers too got affected during Pandemic on every front i.e., Physical, Mental, Social, Spiritual and Financial.

Keywords: Seafarers, COVID-19, Physical wellbeing, Mental wellbeing, Social wellbeing, Spiritual health, Financial impact

Merchant navy is an essential occupation which played a very important and crucial role during Pandemic. Merchant Navy consists of fleet of ships that are responsible for transporting goods from one country to another. It is one of the essential for the international trade as most of the import and export are done through ships. Hence it also influences the economy of the world.

Merchant navy plays a very important role in transporting all type of products to different countries of the world. For all our daily supplies we know that these ships play a vital role.

¹Psychologist, Shobhit Institute of Engineering & Technology, Meerut, India

²Professor, Shobhit Institute of Engineering & Technology, Meerut, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: October 22, 2021; Revision Received: December 19, 2021; Accepted: December 28, 2021

Impact of COVID19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

Seafarers work with these commercial ships, consisting of tanks, cargo, cruise etc. A very big number of people work as seafarers. They lead a very challenging life on ships. Facing all type of weather conditions while they sail through the different parts of the world. It is a very demanding job consisting of long working hours with tough physical working conditions. It is not a regular 9 to 5 job. They are on job/duty continuously for the period they are on ship. Their duty keeps them away from their family and friends for a long duration. Which also impacts their mental health too many times. They have to learn to manage everything themselves while sailing like sudden sickness, injury, accidents etc.

During the spread of Pandemic people employed in different fields were working from home. But these ships were continuously moving and supplying essential items all over the world, during these tough times. The ships and people working on them continuously operated during pandemic as the international trade and import and export of products otherwise would have come to standstill.

The lockdown was decision taken by countries of the world. Due to that a large number of seafarers were stranded on the ships. As the regular activities on reaching ports were not possible, like going out on the ports and meeting people, or going back home (as international flights were cancelled or limited), hence many of them felt isolated and experienced uncertainty, anxiety, worry etc.

They even were away from the family during and unable to reach for any event neither good or bad during Pandemic. Which can be traumatic and disturbing for anyone.

Hence, to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the seafarers this study is conducted. This study aims to understand the impact of COVID-19 on Physical, Mental, Emotional and Spiritual aspects of life of these seafarers.

For this research, the Master of the ship from Synergy company helped to collect data from the other seafarers. Hence, the information collected is from seafarers working on different ships.

METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis

- There is no impact of COVID-19 on the Physical, Mental Health, Social and Spiritual life of Seafarers.
- The data was collected with the questionnaire designed to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the Physical, Mental, Spiritual and Social life of seafarers.

Participants

87 participants of all different ranks participated. These participants were from different Ships and at different Ranks.

Survey (Questionnaire)

The Questionnaire consist of 30 statements. It is studying the Impact of COVID-19 on Physical, Mental, Spiritual and Personal life of people working in Merchant Navy. A pilot study was conducted and the required changes were done in the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Based on the information received the result on each sphere is shared in detail.

7. Were you stuck for a long time at Home during Lockdown and unable to join ship on time
87 responses

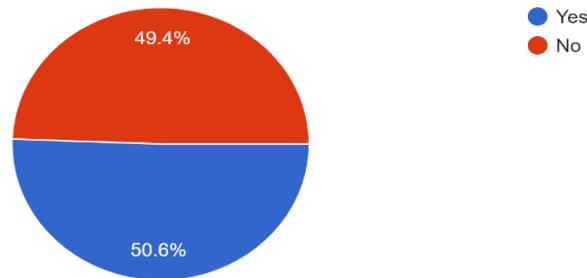


Fig 1. This study shows that the Pandemic impacted the professional life of seafarers, the people stuck for long time at Home were 44 out of total of 87 seafarers. Hence the percentage of people stuck at Home during severe lockdown were 50.6 percent of the total population surveyed.

8. Were you stuck for a long time on Ship during lockdown (exceeding the contract period)
87 responses

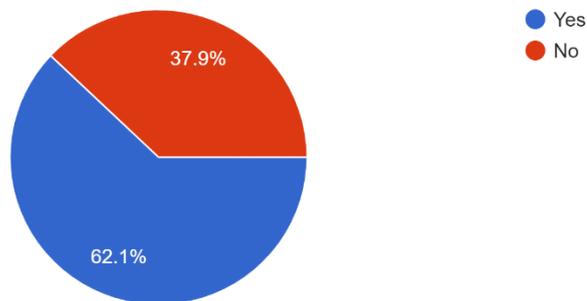


Fig 2 Hence this survey also studies the number of seafarers stuck for long time on Ship were 54 out of total of 87 seafarers. Hence the percentage of people stuck on Ship during severe lockdown were 62.1 percent of the total population surveyed. This shows that a big number of seafarers are affected and were unable to leave the ship for a long duration as there were different restrictions imposed by different countries of the world, which further impacted these seafarers.

9. Did you experience financial hardships due to Lockdown restrictions
87 responses

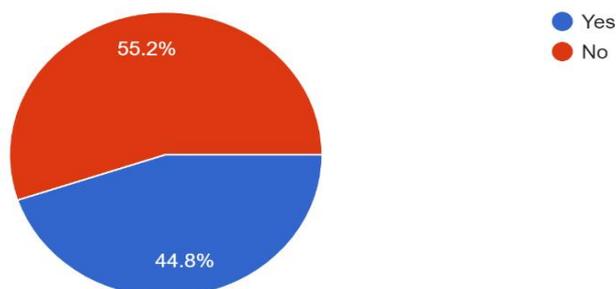


Fig 3 Another important aspect which has been studied in this survey is the seafarers who experienced financial hardship during the lockdown. The number of seafarers who

Impact of COVID19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

experienced Financial hard ships was 39 out of 87. Which brings it to a 44.8 percentage out of the total number surveyed. The number which experienced no financial hardships though is bigger i.e., 48. But there is very slight difference between the two groups.

10. Did you suffer from anxiety or sad mood when you were not able to travel back home
87 responses

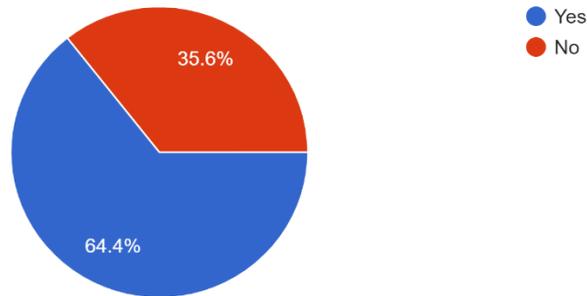


Fig 4 To understand the impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on the mental health of the seafarers. This statement shows that when seafarers were unable to go back home a big number of people experienced anxiety. Survey shows that out of 87 seafarers surveyed 56 experienced anxiety and sad mood when they were unable to go back home during the Lockdown, which is 64.4 percent.

11. Were you infected with COVID19
87 responses

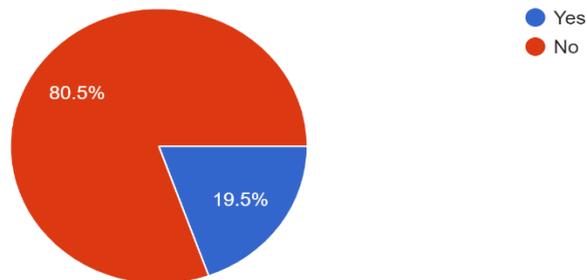
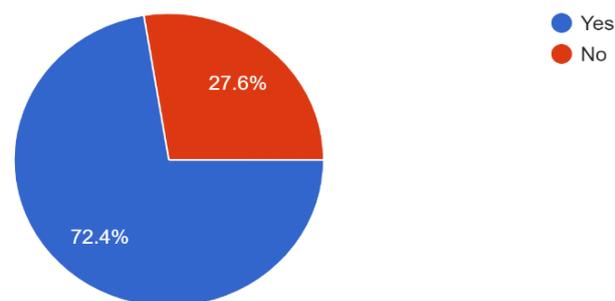


Fig 5 Though the research show that fairly small number of seafarers were infected with COVID-19, i.e., 17 seafarers or 19.5 percent and 70 seafarers or 80.5 percent were not infected.

12. Do you worry for your Physical health
87 responses



Impact of COVID19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

Fig 6 But still a big number 73 out of 87 or 72.4 percent do worry for their own Physical Health during the spread of Pandemic. Though seafarers are tested before they join the ship. At every port many of the authority people do enter the ship for different task. Which again make seafarers vulnerable and increases the probabilities of catching the virus. As per the guidelines for COVID-19 the symptoms some time appear after 14 days also. Ship and the Masters were well-versed about the immediate medical aid to given to people. As they are far away from the appropriate medical aid while traveling. Hence this study too shows that fairly large number of them are worried for their health.

13. Did you frequently experience worry, anxiety, stress since March 2020
87 responses

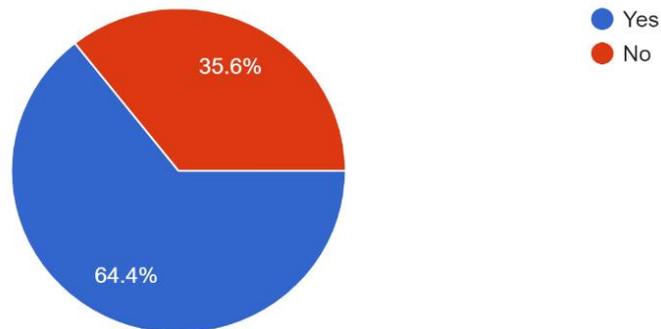


Fig 7 Further this study shows that seafarers frequently even experienced anxiety, worry and stress since the spread of Pandemic since March 2020, as 56 out of 87 seafarers expressed 'Yes' to this statement i.e., 64.4 percent of them. Showing how the mental health of these seafarers has been negatively impacted since the break of Pandemic. Seafarers have shared that the uncertainty of the pandemic did result into developing anxiety among them. Many experienced the dead of their loved ones which further caused the anxiety to grow among some of them.

14. Did your belief increase in spiritual activities like listening to bhajans, mantras, meditations etc. since the Pandemic
87 responses

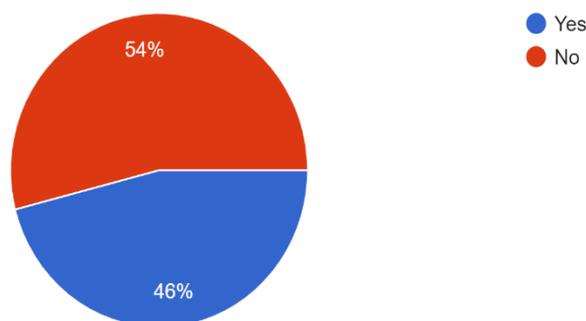


Fig 8 Further to know the effect of the Pandemic on the spiritual aspects of the people. This study shows that though 54 percent of them experienced no change in their spiritual practices but fairly good number of them i.e., 46 percent saw an increase in the spiritual activities like listening to Bhajans, Mantras, Meditation etc.

Impact of COVID19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

15. Did your belief decrease in spiritual activities like listening to bhajans, mantras, meditations etc. since the Pandemic

87 responses

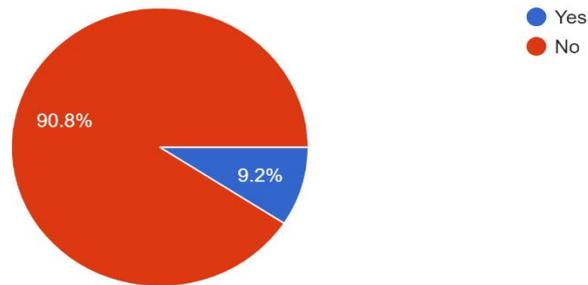


Fig 9 This study further even understands if there has been decrease in the spiritual activities like listening to bhajans, mantras, meditation etc. since the Pandemic. Out of 87 seafarers 79 expressed that there is no decrease in the Spiritual activities. Which is 90.8 percent of people. Showing that even during such difficult and tough times when people were experiencing loss of life on such a large scale, still their belief had not decreased.

16. Have your Interpersonal skills deteriorated since March 2020

87 responses

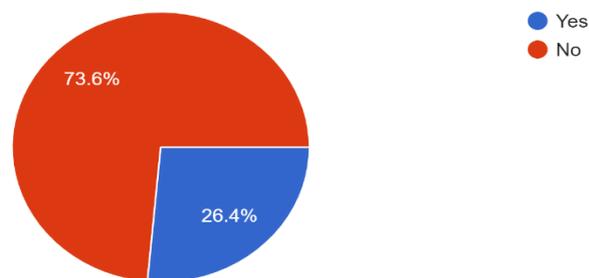
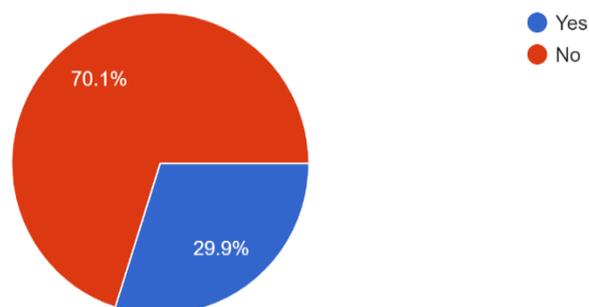


Fig 10 This study also analysing if during Pandemic if the Interpersonal skills of the seafarers got affected. Results show that 73.6 percent or 64 out of 87 did not experience any deterioration in the interpersonal skills. Though smaller percentage i.e., 26.4 percent but still 23 out of 87 did experience a drop in their interpersonal skills. Which is important as interpersonal skills impacting every aspect of the life i.e., the mental and the physical health.

17. Have your Interpersonal skills improved since March 2020

87 responses



Impact of COVID19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

Fig 11 Further this study also understands if there is any improvement in their interpersonal skills. Results reveal that 26 seafarers out of 87 expressed that their interpersonal skills improved. Were as 70.1 percent of them did not experience any improvement.

18. Does travelling during Signing ON and Signing OFF cause severe concern to the family since Pandemic

87 responses

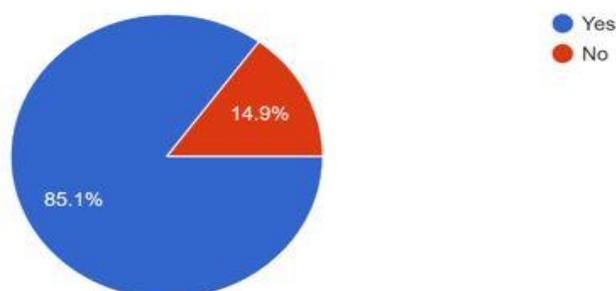


Fig 12 Another very important aspect of a seafarer's job is that it is a contract for a limited duration of time hence they have to travel across the boundaries of different countries for joining the ships. There were different restrictions imposed by different countries since the outbreak of Pandemic. Results show that specially during Pandemic travelling during Signing ON and Signing OFF was of server concern to the family members of these Seafarers. As 74 out of 87 said 'Yes' i.e., 85.1 percent of them. Which is again a clear indication that how psychological health of people got severely affected during the pandemic.

19. Does the health of family members cause concern to you

87 responses

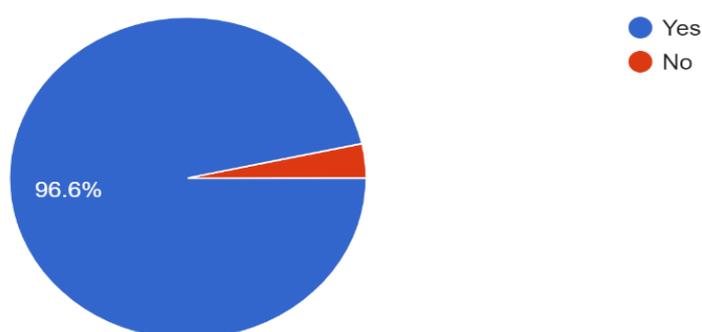


Fig 13 For any human being both personal and professional life plays a vital role. Family is the core support system for all. Results of the study reveal that maximum number of seafarers were concerned about the health of their family members. It is 96.6 percent of the people or 84 out of 87 expressed their concern for the health of their family members. During Pandemic many of the seafarers were unable to travel back home, that too resulted into concern for their family people.

Impact of COVID19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

20. Did your Relationships experience fluctuations during this period

87 responses

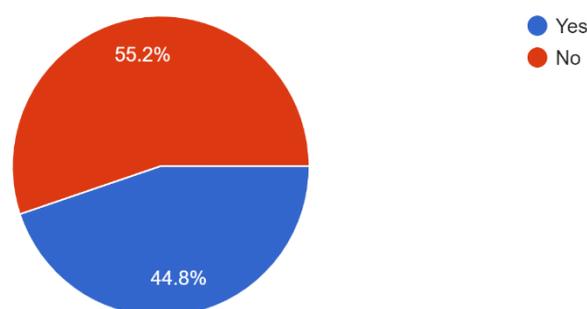


Fig 14 One of the most important aspect of a one's life is the relationships in our life. The results of this study show that the relationships of the 44.8 percent of them experienced fluctuations. Though 55.2 percent experienced no fluctuations or stability in their relationships. As 68 of them are married or engaged and 64 of them are parent to either one, two or three kids also. Hence status of relationships is crucial.

21. Were there more Positive or Negative changes in your children since March 2020

87 responses

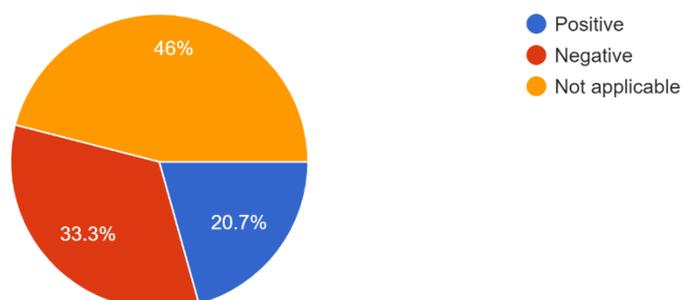


Fig 15 Further to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the family life and relationships, this study is analysing if the children of the seafarers are positively or negatively impacted during this Pandemic. Children were totally confined to their homes during these times. The study reveals that 20.7 percent (18 seafarers) experienced Positive changes were as 33.3 percent (29 seafarers) experienced Negatively changes in their children during this Pandemic. As 46 percent (40 seafarers) of them are not having children.

To add further to the study, when asked if they hold themselves responsible for the changes in their children. Then out of 47 percent, 31 percent said 'yes'. Which means that whether the changes were positive or negative the seafarers feel that they were responsible for it in their children.

Impact of COVID19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

23. Did you learn a new Professional Skill during Pandemic, since March 2020
87 responses

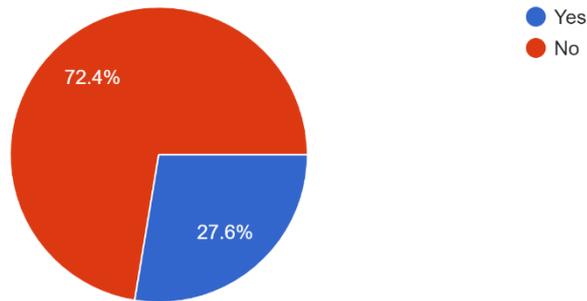


Fig 16 It was a time when many seafarers were stuck at home. Hence to understand if they were inspired to learn some new skill during this time. The study shows that 27.6 percent of seafarers learnt new skills whereas 72.4 percent did not learn any new skill.

24. Did you take up any other Job/ work since March 2020
87 responses

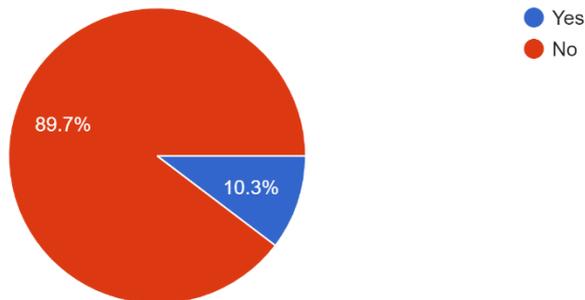


Fig 17 To further understand their professional status during the Pandemic it was noticed that 10.3 percent of them did take up some other job/ work. Whereas the maximum of them i.e., 89.7 percent of them did not.

25. Would you like to change your profession (Seafarers Job) since Pandemic
87 responses

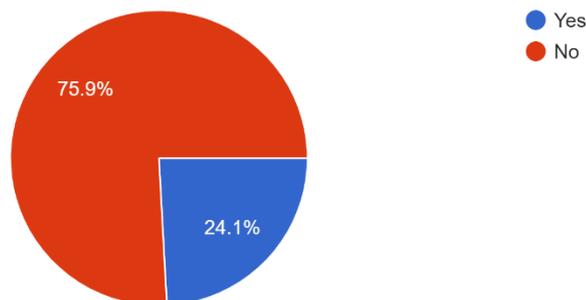


Fig 18 Their professional preference was also visible in this statement. When 75.9 percent want to continue with this profession of Merchant Navy. A small percentage still would be

Impact of COVID19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

willing to change their profession as the seafarers since Pandemic. Showing that the professional choices of the people did get impacted as the world experienced COVID-19 Pandemic.

26. If given an opportunity would you like to get vaccinated on Ship
87 responses

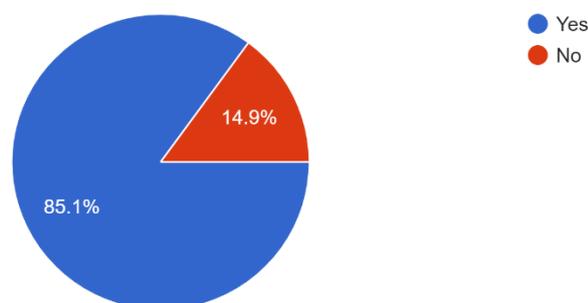


Fig 19 And one of the most important concerns during Pandemic has been the vaccination to be taken. As the seafarers have been travelling for long durations and they have to travel different countries during boarding, reaching ashore. Hence completion of vaccination process for their health and safety is essential. They are in continuous exposure to the people from different countries. Hence 85.1 percent are arranging to.

DISCUSSION

Through this study the well-being of seafarers is been studied during Pandemic. This study is understanding the impact of COVI19 Pandemic on their Physical, Mental, Social and Spiritual health. The total participants were 87.

- **Physical Wellbeing** – This study show that a small number were infected with COVID 19, i.e., 17 or 19.5 percent of seafarers. Still a large number of seafarers i.e., 72.4 percent do worry for their own Physical Health. Maximum number of them i.e., 85.1 percent are also willing for the vaccination even on the ship to maintain their physical health. Data show that 72.4 percent of them worry for their Physical health, again a big percentage of them are showing concern for their physical health. When asked if they develop any addictive habit since pandemic then, 85 percent of them did not develop any addictive habits during these times.
- **Mental Wellbeing** – To understand the impact of COVID-19 on the seafarer's mental health, based on the responses show that 64.4 percent of them suffer from anxiety or sad mood when they are not able to travel back home. 85.1 percent of them accept that travelling during Signing ON and Signing OFF cause severe concern to the family since Pandemic. Further 64.4 percent of them accept that they frequently experience worry, anxiety, stress since March 2020. Whereas, 96. 6 percent of them agree that health of family members is a constant cause of concern to them.
- **Social Wellbeing** – Data show that 26.4 percent experience deterioration in their Interpersonal skills since March 2020. Further it was noted that 44.8 percent of them experienced relationship fluctuations during this period. Study also shows that 33.3 percent of them noticed Negative changes in your children since March 2020. Despite the hardships faced during Pandemic still, 75.9 percent of seafarers want to continue with this profession.

Impact of COVID19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

- **Spiritual Health** – This study also understands the impact of Pandemic on their Spiritual beliefs, 46 percent saw an increase in the spiritual activities like listening to Bhajans, Mantras, Meditation etc. Further it reveals an important aspect that even during such difficult and tough times when people were experiencing loss of life on such a large scale, still 91 percent of them accept that their belief has not decreased.
- **Financial Impact** - The study reveal that 27.6 percent of seafarers learnt new skills. 50.6 percent people were stuck at Home during severe lockdown, whereas 62.1 percent people stuck on Ship during severe lockdown. Study also shows that 45 percent of seafarers who experienced Financial hard ships since Pandemic.

According to many of the seafarers one big change on the ship is that there are No shore leaves to get refreshed or relax and further they have additional precautions to take care off each time they reach a port. There are many new rules and regulations to be followed. Every time crew changes it becomes a difficult situation. A timely sign ON and Sign OFF are no more taking place.

While sharing their personal experiences, they shared that they lost their loved ones and could not be for their families at that time. Family members of some of them got infected with COVID-19, and they were unable to reach to them nor able to maintain regular communicate due to lack of facilities on some of the ships. Some of them have been facing financial crunch too. Further some of the Masters shared that the role of Masters has been more challenging on the ship, as they have to manage Emotional wellbeing of the crew and that too without adequate support from management.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 Pandemic was a usual situation and condition, this study show that seafarers too got affected during Pandemic on every front i.e., Physical, Mental, Social, Spiritual and Financial. Many expressed their concern for the health of their family members. During Pandemic many of the seafarers were unable to travel back home, that too resulted into concern for their family people. A big number of seafarers are affected as they were unable to leave the ship for a long duration, there were different restrictions imposed by different countries of the world, which further impacted these seafarers.

Hence this study too shows that fairly large number of them are worried for their own health. As they have to interact with different people at each port, Seafarers are vulnerable and this too increases the probabilities of catching the virus. As per the guidelines for COVID-19 the symptoms some time appear after 14 days also. Ship and the Masters were well-versed about the immediate medical aid to given to people. But still it caused worry among most of the seafarers.

Seafarers have shared that the uncertainty of the pandemic did result into developing anxiety among them. Many experienced the death of their loved ones which further caused the anxiety to grow among many of them.

The status of relationships is of great importance to us all, same goes for the seafarers. Seafarers are the ones who are away from their families for a long duration. Specially during Pandemic, many were away for longer duration than usual. Not just their relationships but even they experienced negatively changes in their children during this Pandemic. During these tough times some seafarers were with family but among them many faced financial crunch. Study shows that a small percentage is willing to change their profession as the

Impact of COVID19 on the Well-being of Seafarers

seafarers since Pandemic. Some of them were inspired to learn some new skill during this time.

One essential revelation of this study is that during such hard and difficult times also when people were experiencing loss of life on such a large scale, still 91 percent of them accept that their belief has not decreased.

Hence this study has provided a good understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of the seafarers on all the spheres of life.

REFERENCES

- Bhanawat A (2021) Life at Sea, <https://www.marineinsight.com/life-at-sea/world-should-learn-from-seafarers/>, Ship Electrical Circuits Volume 1 and 2
- Jones E (2020), Martide Seafarer Blog, <https://bit.ly/3exKhVK>
- Iswan (2020), Life at sea during the COVID-19 pandemic, <https://bit.ly/3Ev6Apn>
- Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sailor>
- Iswan (2019) Seafarers' Mental Health and Wellbeing, <https://bit.ly/3sE7zRW>
- Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merchant_navy
- Vandenborn Yves (2018), Standard Safety: Seafarer Wellbeing, <https://bit.ly/3sER1cp>

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Capt. Gautam Chopra for constantly guiding and supporting on this research paper. I am thankful and fortunate enough to get constant assistance and guidance from him for collecting information from the seafarers on this research. I am thankful to my guide Dr. Poonam Devdutt, Director, Centre for Psychology and Human Behaviour, Shobhit Institute of Engineering & Technology, Meerut, for spending time while guiding me on this research.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Chopra J. & Devdutt P. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on the Well-being of Seafarers. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(4), 1848-1859. DIP:18.01.176.20210904, DOI:10.25215/0904.176