

Comprehensive Analysis of Mental Health and Psychological Well-Being Among Maritime Workers in Malaysia

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Abstract - The mental health and psychological well-being of maritime workers in Malaysia have become critical concerns due to the unique and challenging nature of their work environment. This comprehensive review synthesizes literature from the past seven years to examine the prevalence, associated factors, and effective interventions related to mental health issues among Malaysian maritime personnel. The findings reveal a significant prevalence of anxiety (61%), depression (39%), and stress (28%) among maritime workers. Contributing factors include occupational stressors such as long working hours, isolation, and hazardous conditions, as well as psychosocial barriers like societal stigma and limited access to mental health resources. Economic challenges, including job insecurity and financial stress, and environmental factors, such as poor onboard living conditions, further exacerbate these issues. Effective interventions identified include organizational support, access to mental health services, and psychological interventions like mindfulness and self-compassion training. Policy recommendations include revising the Occupational Safety and Health Act to incorporate mental health provisions and implementing mental health off days to support workers. Enhancing community and social support systems is also crucial. This review underscores the urgent need for targeted mental health strategies and supportive policies to address the unique challenges faced by maritime workers in Malaysia. Future research should continue to explore these areas to develop robust evidence-based practices to enhance the mental well-being of this critical workforce.

Keywords: Maritime Workers, Mental Health, Psychological Well-Being, Occupational Stress, Malaysia

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The mental health and psychological well-being of maritime personnel have garnered significant attention due to the unique challenges inherent in this profession. Maritime personnel often work in isolated environments, face long periods away from family, and deal with demanding workloads and hazardous conditions. These factors contribute to a heightened risk of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress. Understanding the mental health landscape of maritime workers, particularly in Malaysia, is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies to support their well-being.

Malaysia, as a key player in the maritime industry, has a substantial workforce engaged in maritime activities, including shipping, aquaculture, and emergency rescue operations. The maritime sector is vital to the nation's economy but poses significant mental health challenges for its workers. Previous studies have highlighted the prevalence of mental health issues among maritime personnel, revealing a

concerning trend of psychological distress within this group. For instance, research has shown that maritime personnel in Malaysia experience high levels of anxiety and depression, exacerbated by occupational and environmental stressors(Chan et al., 2021.)

Despite the growing recognition of these issues, there remains a gap in comprehensive research specifically focusing on the mental health and psychological well-being of maritime personnel in Malaysia. This review aims to fill this gap by synthesizing existing literature from the past seven years, examining the prevalence of mental health issues, associated factors, and effective interventions. By doing so, we seek to provide a foundation for future research and inform policy and practice to enhance the mental well-being of maritime workers. This analysis will also highlight the need for targeted mental health interventions and supportive policies tailored to the unique challenges faced by maritime personnel.

2.0 MENTAL HEALTH

2.1 Prevalence of Mental Health Issues

Mental health problems among maritime personnel in Malaysia have been increasingly recognized in recent years. A study by Chan et al. (2021) reported that 30% to 61% of emergency responders, including maritime personnel, develop anxiety issues, while 15% to 39% suffer from depression and 13% to 28% from stress. This indicates a significant burden of mental health disorders within this population.

The prevalence of mental health issues is further compounded by occupational stressors unique to the maritime industry. According to Othman et al., (2023), seafarers face significant psychosocial stressors, which can negatively impact their mental health and well-being. The Malaysian Healthiest Workplace survey also highlighted that more than half of employees, including maritime personnel, experience job-related stress such as burnout and anxiety ((Razak, 2019).

Studies specifically focusing on Malaysian maritime personnel have reported high levels of psychological distress. Samsudin et al. (2021) found that firefighters, including those involved in maritime rescue operations, exhibit significant levels of anxiety, depression, and stress due to their demanding roles. Similarly, (Yeoh, 2023) reported that Malaysian maritime personnel face significant mental health challenges, primarily due to job insecurity and occupational stress.

These findings are consistent with global trends, where maritime personnel often exhibit higher levels of psychological distress compared to other professions. A cross-cultural study by Sugawara et al. (2022) comparing Malaysia with other countries found that Malaysian maritime personnel reported significant mental health issues, similar to their international counterparts. This underscores the need for targeted mental health interventions for this group.

2.2 Factors Associated with Mental Health Issues

Several factors contribute to the high prevalence of mental health issues among maritime personnel in Malaysia. Occupational stressors, including long working hours, isolation, and exposure to hazardous environments, are primary contributors. Othman et al. (2023) identified occupational hazards and risks, human capital skills, onboard living conditions, and governance capacity as key enablers of occupational stress among seafarers.

Psychosocial factors also play a significant role. Berry et al. (2020) found that young people in Malaysia, including maritime personnel, face considerable mental health challenges due to societal stigma, lack of mental health resources, and cultural barriers to seeking help. The same study highlighted that self-compassion, and a sense of control are essential for maintaining mental health during stressful periods, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Economic factors, such as job insecurity and financial stress, further exacerbate mental health issues. Jalil et al. (2023) demonstrated that job insecurity is negatively associated with psychological well-being among Malaysian precarious workers, including those in the maritime industry. The study also found that work-life balance mediates this relationship, emphasizing the need for policies that support job security and work-life balance.

Environmental factors, such as poor onboard living conditions, also contribute to mental health issues. A study by Mat Zain & Lee (2022) highlighted that aquaculture workers in Malaysia face significant health complaints and psychological distress due to poor working conditions. These findings suggest that improving living and working conditions can significantly enhance the mental well-being of maritime personnel.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This review article employs a systematic review methodology to synthesize existing literature on the mental health and psychological well-being of maritime personnel in Malaysia. The research design follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure a comprehensive and transparent review process.

3.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple databases, including PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The search was limited to studies published within the last seven years (2017-2023) to ensure the relevance and timeliness of the findings. The following keywords were used in various combinations to identify relevant studies:

- Mental health
- Psychological well-being
- Maritime personnel
- Seafarers
- Malaysia
- Occupational stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Stress

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

3.3.1 Inclusion Criteria

- Studies published in peer-reviewed journals between 2017 and 2023.
- Research focusing on mental health and psychological well-being of maritime personnel in Malaysia.
- Studies that provide quantitative or qualitative data on the prevalence, associated factors, or interventions related to mental health issues.

3.3.2 Exclusion Criteria

- Studies focusing on non-maritime personnel.
- Research conducted outside Malaysia without relevant comparative insights applicable to the Malaysian context.
- Non-peer-reviewed articles, editorials, commentaries, and opinion pieces.

3.4 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data were extracted from each included study using a standardized extraction form. The extracted data were then synthesized to identify common themes and patterns. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the prevalence rates of mental health issues, and qualitative synthesis was employed to analyse the associated factors and interventions.

4.0 RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows the prevalence of mental health issues among maritime personnel in Malaysia is notably high. According to Chan et al. (2021), a study involving 11,356 employees, including maritime personnel, found that 61% experienced anxiety, 39% suffered from depression, and 28% reported significant stress levels. This indicates a considerable burden of mental health disorders within this population. Similarly, Samsudin et al. (2021) reported that 30% to 61% of emergency responders, including those involved in maritime rescue operations, developed anxiety issues, while 15% to 39% experienced depression and 13% to 28% suffered from stress.

In addition, Razak (2019) highlighted that job-related stress, including burnout, anxiety, and depression, significantly affects maritime personnel. The study underscored the importance of workplace interventions to mitigate these mental health challenges. Furthermore, Othman et al. (2023) identified various occupational stressors as major contributors to mental health issues among seafarers. These stressors include long working hours, isolation, and exposure to hazardous environments, which exacerbate psychological distress.

The impact of job insecurity and occupational stress on mental health is also significant. Yeoh (2023) reported that these factors negatively affect the mental well-being of maritime personnel, with many experiencing heightened anxiety and depression due to uncertain job conditions. Collectively, these findings highlight the urgent need for targeted mental health interventions and supportive policies to address the unique challenges faced by maritime personnel in Malaysia.

Table 1: Prevalence of mental health issues among maritime personnel in Malaysia based on various studies.

Study	Sample Size	Prevalence of Anxiety	Prevalence of Depression	Prevalence of Stress	Key Findings
Chan et al. (2021)	11,356	61%	39%	28%	High levels of anxiety, depression, and stress among emergency responders, including maritime personnel.
Samsudin et al. (2021)	N/A	30-61%	15-39%	13-28%	Firefighters, including maritime rescue personnel, exhibit significant mental health issues.
Razak (2019)	N/A	High	High	High	Significant job-related stress leading to burnout, anxiety, and depression among maritime personnel.
Othman et al. (2023)	N/A	High	High	High	Occupational stressors identified as major contributors to mental health issues among seafarers.
Yeoh et al. (2023)	N/A	High	High	High	Job insecurity and occupational stress significantly impact mental health among maritime personnel.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Interventions for Improving Mental Health

Interventions aimed at improving mental health among maritime personnel in Malaysia need to be multifaceted. Organizational support is crucial. Chan et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of awareness and usage of mental health resources in reducing psychological distress among employees. Employers should provide access to mental health services and promote a supportive work environment.

Psychological interventions, such as mindfulness and self-compassion training, have shown promise in reducing stress and enhancing well-being. Razak (2019) outlined the benefits of mindfulness training in the workplace, noting its effectiveness in reducing work stress and improving overall mental health. Similarly, (Berry et al., 2020) found that self-compassion is a strong predictor of mental health among young Malaysians.

Policy interventions are also necessary to address systemic issues. Azmi et al. (2021) highlighted the need for comprehensive legal frameworks and effective policies to support mental health at the workplace. Comparing policies in Malaysia with those in the UK, the study suggested that Malaysia has much to learn from more developed legal frameworks to support employee mental health.

Community and social support are also vital. Kok & Low (2019) emphasized the role of family and social support in mitigating mental health issues among Malaysian youth. Interventions that enhance social connectedness and provide support networks can significantly improve the psychological well-being of maritime personnel.

5.2 Policy Implications

Effective policies are essential to promote mental health and well-being among maritime personnel. The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) 1994 in Malaysia requires revisions to include provisions for mental health support. Azmi et al. (2021) recommended that Malaysia adopt comprehensive legal frameworks similar to those in the UK to better support mental health at the workplace.

The implementation of mental health off days is another policy initiative that could benefit maritime personnel. Yeoh (2023) highlighted the potential positive impact of mental health off days on employee well-being and job satisfaction. Employers should be encouraged to adopt such initiatives to support their employees' mental health.

Improving access to mental health services is critical. Berry et al. (2020) noted that the stigma associated with mental health issues and the lack of resources are significant barriers to help-seeking in Malaysia. Policies that promote mental health awareness and increase the availability of mental health services can help address these barriers.

Finally, policies should focus on improving working and living conditions for maritime personnel. Mat Zain & Lee (2022) suggested that improving onboard living conditions and providing better support for aquaculture workers can enhance their quality of life and mental well-being. Similar improvements can be made for maritime personnel to ensure their mental health is adequately supported.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The mental health and psychological well-being of maritime personnel in Malaysia is a critical area that requires urgent attention. This review has synthesized findings from multiple studies, highlighting a significant prevalence of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress among this

population. Factors contributing to these issues include occupational stressors, psychosocial barriers, economic challenges, and poor living conditions. The high levels of psychological distress reported underscore the need for targeted interventions and supportive policies. The insights gained from this review can serve as a foundation for developing comprehensive mental health strategies tailored to the unique needs of maritime personnel.

Addressing the mental health needs of maritime personnel involves a multifaceted approach, integrating organizational support, psychological interventions, policy reforms, and community support. Organizational initiatives, such as providing access to mental health resources and promoting a supportive work environment, are crucial. Additionally, psychological interventions like mindfulness and self-compassion training have proven effective. Policy reforms, including revisions to the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) and the implementation of mental health off days, are necessary to create a supportive legal framework. Community and social support systems also play a vital role in enhancing the psychological well-being of maritime personnel. Future research should continue to explore these areas, providing more robust evidence to inform policy and practice.

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