



Maritime health of Chinese seafarers

Pengfei Zhang*, Minghua Zhao

China Centre Maritime, School of Maritime Science and Engineering, Southampton Solent University, East Park Terrace, Southampton SO14 0YN, United Kingdom



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Maritime health
Chinese seafarers

ABSTRACT

Seafarers make a critical contribution to civil society, but seafarers' health has received comparatively little attention in the maritime world. China has the largest population of seafarers, and Chinese seafarers are working on board merchant ships flying different flags. The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 entered into force in China in November 2016, and it has already generated significant impact in terms of policy, legislation and maritime practice. However, while seafarers' treatment has been improved significantly in many countries, in particular in developed countries, Chinese seafarers are still facing some challenges relating to health issues, such as long working hours, insufficient nutrition, lack of recreation and poor mental health. Based on existing knowledge and scholarship available in the public domain, together with primary data collected in several phases of fieldwork, this paper critically examines a number of major issues relating to maritime health of Chinese seafarers.

1. Introduction

In 2010, the then International Maritime Organisation (hereinafter IMO) Secretary General Metropoulos spoke at the celebration of World Maritime Day: 'Seafaring is a difficult and demanding job, with its own set of unique pressures and risks' [1]. When a ship is sailing at sea, it is a separate and isolated work and living space. In circumstances of injury or acute illness, even though there is usually a person in charge of medical treatment aboard, it is not of the kind that would be provided by a medical doctor on land. Illness and injuries are among the main causes resulting in seafarers' deaths at sea. Therefore, it is of great importance to ensure that all seafarers are medically fit to perform their duties on sea-going vessels, and when sick or injured at sea, seafarers can receive decent essential medical treatment and care until they can be transferred to a land-based medical facility, if necessary

'Maritime trade is global and seafarers are recruited worldwide. Consistent international approaches to decisions on fitness to work at sea are therefore essential', as Tim Carter, Professor at Norwegian Centre for Maritime Medicine, University of Bergen and Chief Medical Adviser, United Kingdom Maritime and Coastguard Agency said in his widely acclaimed *Handbook for Seafarer Medical Examiners*.

International organizations, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the IMO, both agencies of the United Nations (UN), have a long history in establishment of uniform standards to regulate seafarers' physical requirements. These standards have played an important role in ensuring that seafarers are physically fit to work aboard ships. China, as the largest seafarers supplying nation, has made

various efforts to comply with the international standards. However, for many reasons Chinese seafarers still face many problems. These problems not only prevent Chinese seafarers from invoking their rights and entitlements according to international standards, but also cause potential dangers for the safe operation of ships at sea

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the conditions of Chinese seafarers' rights relating to their health protection and medical care on board ship. This paper has the following objectives:

- to present a systematic review of the international standards regarding seafarers' physical requirements made by the international organizations;
- to identify relevant regulations with regard to seafarers' physical requirements in China;
- to examine the main health issues which Chinese seafarers face;
- to investigate the main problems with regard to medical examination and certification faced by Chinese seafarers.

2. Methods

To achieve the above objectives, this research takes an interdisciplinary approach, which includes both sociology and legal studies. From a legal perspective, this paper relies on the analysis of policy documents related to maritime health standards. In addition, the core of the study examines existing and developing seafarers' entitlements in legislation and in practice and the implementation of relevant international and national standards. Through policy document analysis

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: shippinglaw@163.com (P. Zhang).

information can be extracted to explain how the Chinese government responds to the changing international policy-making environment and how these responses improve Chinese seafarers' health protection and medical care on board. A wide range of policy documents made by international bodies and the Chinese government are analysed in Sections 3 and 4. Major stakeholders, including individual seafarers, were interviewed to investigate major health issues and challenges, and their opinions for future improvement.

This paper draws on the primary data collected in several phases of fieldwork between 2013 and 2016, with follow-up data gathering activities through WeChat and QQ Talk with contacts in China. WeChat and QQ Talk are the most popular phone-based chat applications which are widely used in China. In 2016 WeChat and QQ Talk had more than 889 million and 660 million active users respectively in China. There is an even higher penetration rate among Chinese seafarers because these tools provide an indispensable channel for them to maintain communication with their families and friends when they are working on board. The field trips covered several major port cities in China as far north as Dalian and as far south as Guangzhou, including the major coastal ports between these. Further, Zhang worked in the maritime industry for more than 20 years including 8 years at sea, thereby providing access to a large number of respondents in key sectors of the industry. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for empirical data gathering with a range of key stakeholders: seafarers, ship management companies, ship owning companies, seafarers' medical doctors, crewing agencies, and government officials. In the 'follow-up' activities, a WeChat group discussion was carried out with Shanghai Marine Shipping Association (SMSA) to 'catch' the views and experiences of more individuals who have direct experience in dealing with maritime health issues.

3. International standards for seafarers' physical requirements

The international standards with regard to seafarers' physical requirements derive mainly from the ILO and IMO. To provide 'adequate protection for the life and health of workers in all occupations' is one of ILO's fundamental principles of occupational health and safety [2]. Since its establishment, the IMO has also developed a series of standards relating to health fitness for seafarers, notably the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW 1978, as amended). STCW stipulates that not only physical fitness is a precondition for a seafarer to work on board, but also that they must possess a valid medical certificate.

3.1. Minimum age requirement

To prevent under-age employment is a fundamental issue. The ILO has adopted 13 conventions dealing with this issue and five of these are directly related to seafaring. Merchant seafaring has been traditionally treated as the most hazardous occupation, not only because it tends to jeopardise the health and safety of seafarers, but also because it often involves exposure to more potential fatality risks than in many other occupations. It is, therefore, of particular importance to prevent under-age persons to work on a ship. Since its establishment in 1919, the ILO has taken a series of measures to regulate the minimum age of employment. The fifth Convention adopted by the ILO is the 'Minimum Age (Industry) Convention, 1919', which states that 'children under the age of fourteen years shall not be employed or work in any public or private industrial undertaking' [3]. This Convention was revised in 1937 by the ILO C059 and the minimum age was set at fifteen years [4]. In 1920, the ILO adopted a specific Convention with regard to prohibit the employment of children less than fourteen years of age on board any vessel [5]. The Convention was revised in 1936 by the ILO C058, in which the minimum age to be employed on vessels was raised to fifteen years [6].

In 1973, with a view to establish a general instrument to 'ensure the

effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons' the ILO adopted the Minimum Age Convention, 1973. In this Convention, the minimum age for general admission to any occupation was set at 15 years. However, for the type of 'employment or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardise the health, safety or morals of young persons', the minimum age shall not be less than 18 years [7]. In 1996, the minimum age for seafarers working on board ship was set at 16 years in the Seafarers' Hours of Work and the Manning of Ships Convention, 1996 [8].

Considering the need to adopt new instruments for the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour and to complement the Convention and the Recommendation concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 1973 (MAC), the ILO adopted the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 [9]. The WFCLC requests each Member State to take measures to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labour, which shall apply to all persons under the age of 18 [9]. Both the MAC 1973 and the WFCLC 1999 are recognised as the fundamental and core Conventions regarding human rights at work [10]. In 2006, all the previous regulations with regard to seafarers' minimum age of employment were revised by the Regulation 1.1 in the Maritime Labour Convention 2006, in which the minimum age for persons working on board is set at 16 years [11].

3.2. Medical examination

In 1921, the ILO adopted the Medical Examination of Young Persons (Sea) Convention to regulate that '[t]he employment of any child or young person under eighteen years of age on any vessel...shall be conditional on the production of a medical certificate attesting fitness for such work' [12]. This was followed by the Medical Examination (Seafarers) Convention in 1946, which stated that all seafarers should produce certificates attesting their fitness for the relevant work before they were employed at sea [13]. These instruments have now been consolidated into the Regulation 1.2 and the Code provisions of MLC 2006, which prescribes a series of requirements, including that seafarers are required to undergo regular medical examinations and hold a valid certificate attesting their physical fitness.

Under the IMO's STCW Convention, all seafarers must meet minimum standards of competence, age and medical fitness. These standards are prescribed by each national administration provided they should be equivalent to or above the STCW standards. However, before 2010, it was only mandatory in the STCW that seafarers had to be 'reasonably fit and in good health', and each national administration establishes its own standards for seafarer's medical health. However, to promote the export of maritime labour, many national states have refused to establish and enforce strict standards. When the STCW Convention was amended in 2010, the relevant provisions were revised with more detailed mandatory minimum standards of physical fitness for all international seafarers being stipulated [14]. The new amendment also provides that the issuance of certificates of competency is conditional upon providing satisfactory proof of having met the standards of medical fitness specified in section A-I/9 of the STCW Code, including, in certain cases, minimum standards for eyesight and hearing [15]. In addition, the implementation of the International Safety Management Code also requires seafarers' physical fitness. According to Clause 6.2 of the Code, a 'Company should ensure that each ship is manned by qualified, certificated and medically fit seafarers in accordance with national and international requirements' [16]. However, the ISM has not prescribed the detailed requirement of 'medically fit' and left this to other IMO's instruments.

With national medical examinations for seafarers varying widely, the ILO, together with the World Health Organisation (WHO), adopted the Guidelines for Conducting Pre-sea and Periodic Medical Fitness

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات