STRESS AS HUMAN ELEMENT AT WORK: A SURVEY OF FILIPINO SEAFARERS

Don Eliseo Lucero-Prisno III. University of the Philippines, Open University, The Philippines
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Objectives Seafaring entails working on board ships for a long period of time away from home. This results into various psychological experiences by the world’s 1.2 million seafarers working on international commercial vessels. Filipino seafarers comprise almost 30% of the world’s seafarers. The study will look at the stress management profile of Filipino seafarers including how stress is manifested and implications for prevention.

Method Questionnaires were administered to 2500 Filipino seafarer respondents representing various ranks/positions. Respondents were chosen from different manning agencies and training centres in different parts of the Philippines. Different sets of questionnaires were administered to different sectors such as management and labour. The questionnaire was divided into the following categories: socio-demographic profile, health and lifestyle, attitude towards work and family/home, work and home-related experiences, symptoms/signs of stress, coping with work experiences, and infrastructure on board.

Results Respondents were 69% ratings and 31% officers mostly within the age of 25–50 working in bulk carrier vessels and tankers. Health problems normally experienced are vision, hypertension, muscular, hearing and respiratory. 50% drink alcohol and 20% smoke on board. 55% sleep well and 87% exercise. Most workers are satisfied with their jobs. Significant sources of stress are routine nature of job, long hours of work, tension among crew, and thoughts of impending early retirement. Home-work interface elements are major sources of stress such as family concerns and careers of wives.

Conclusions Socio-psychological problems need to be addressed by developing appropriate programmes. This should be mainstreamed in the occupational health agenda for seafarers.

USE OF SALIVARY BIOMARKERS TO EVALUATE RESPONSE TO A STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTION

1,2David Koh. 1Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei, Brunei Darussalam; 2National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore
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Objectives To discuss methodological issues related to using salivary biomarkers to evaluate response to a stress management intervention.

Method Findings from a study which utilised salivary biomarkers to evaluate group responses to a stress management program are discussed.

In that study, we measured responses to qigong practice as a stress intervention among 34 healthy adults. Specific biomarkers studied were a stress hormone (cortisol); a surrogate marker co-released with acute stress (alpha amylase); and a marker of early physiological response to stress i.e. immune status as reflected by immunoglobulin A (IgA).

Results Acute response to qigong practice, measured by median salivary alpha amylase (U/ml) showed no significant change before and after a one hour session of practice (107.7 and 93.8).

Saliva collection technique, circadian rhythm and half-life of the biomarkers, and their relative concentrations in different body compartments e.g. blood and saliva, can affect the results and were taken into account in the study protocol.

Conclusions For valid interpretation of study findings, the choice of biological markers and other methodological issues have to be considered when using salivary biomarkers to evaluate response to a stress management intervention.