

Working on board vessels of the merchant navy

- a sociological study –

Highlighting the phenomenon of harassment:

an urgent necessity

During my career as an officer in the merchant navy and my experience with trade unions, I have heard many stories about harassment: sexual harassment, managerial harassment, the suicide of a CMA-CGM commanding officer ... The last straw for me personally in terms of testimony was the story of a young female sailor subjected to harassment on board.

Among other incidents, it triggered the process that led the CGT to propose to CERLIS, a laboratory at the Université Paris Descartes, to conduct a study on psychosocial risks in the merchant navy, and this in the context of relations that bind the CGT to the Ires.

Intended primarily to "visualise" the phenomena outlined, an essential prerequisite for their "inclusion on the agenda", this study was led by two sociologists, Angèle Grövel and Jasmina Stevanovic, whose doctoral theses had already been about the marine environment. It met with a particularly favourable reception among the sailors.

The information gathered, extremely detailed, was obtained mainly through a questionnaire offered to sailors during their annual medical visits to the Seafarers' Health Service. Interviews were conducted with the many people who expressed the wish to be able to voice their experiences and what they had been through.

The merchant navy employs a very small number of females. Women represent less than 10% of the workforce. Yet they are still not accepted aboard ships, and in order to be accepted, they must be made to forget that they are women. Whenever an incident arises, such as sexual or psychological harassment, they always have the fear of not being listened to or, worse, being sidelined. Far too many sailors have suffered and continue to suffer harassment and violence of all kinds, but unfortunately, these experiences are rarely reported to the chain of command, the Directorate of Marine Affairs or the police.

This situation is unacceptable!

No woman or man should still have to complain about harassment!

In recent weeks, relayed by the media, countless stories of harassment of all kinds and at all levels of society have been reported.

This study is therefore timely.

I hope that people who have endured, or who still endure, this vile behaviour, can report it without fear, organise themselves to fight it and that justice can be handed down!

The lessons of this research can only contribute to this three-fold objective.

Thanks again to the CERLIS researchers for their work, and to the sailors for their participation.

Jean-Philippe Chateil

Secretary General of FOMM Ugict-CGT

A STUDY CONDUCTED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE RELATIONS THAT BIND THE CGT TO IRES

The research by CERLIS was carried out within the framework of the relations that bind the CGT to the Ires, the Institute of Economic and Social Research (Institut de recherches économiques et sociales; www.ires.fr).

Founded in 1982, the Ires is an association governed by the law of 1901, administered jointly by the representative trade union organisations (TUO) nationally: CFDT, CFE-CGC, CFTC, CGT, CGT-FO, Unsa-Education. Its general assembly includes representatives of the TUO, the Prime Minister, scientific personalities and honorary members.

The Ires receives an annual budget allocation. It dedicates a portion of these funds to its own activities, including the maintenance of documentation and the editing of two publications: *La Chronique internationale de l'Ires* and *La Revue de l'Ires*.

The remainder of the public subsidy received by the Ires is distributed among the TUOs and is used to finance studies carried out under the responsibility of each of them. Its use is subject to common rules that make studies conducted accessible to the public, for example. These can be downloaded from the Ires website. The one by CERLIS is at the following address: <http://www.ires.fr/etudes-recherches-ouvrages/etudes-des-organisations-syndicales/item/5566-travailler-a-bord-des-navires-de-la-marine-marchande-etude-sociologique-des-risques-et-des-violences-physiques-psychologiques-ou-a-caractere-sexuel>

Sociological study of risks and violence of a physical,
psychological or sexual nature

Working on board vessels of the merchant navy

As part of its work, the Centre for Research on Social Links (Centre de recherche sur les liens sociaux, CERLIS - UMR 8070), a laboratory at Université Paris Descartes, focused on how violence and physical, psychological and sexual risks manifest themselves in the merchant navy sector (practices, frequency, intensity). Completed in the autumn of 2017, the survey, conducted under the scientific direction of Margaret Maruani¹, seeks to understand, as a first step, the influence of environmental factors - the act of working and living on a ship - and organisational factors on the physical and mental health of sailors - physical fatigue, mental attrition and stress. Secondly, it provides an overview of occupational violence, including sexist and gender-based violence, in this workplace where women are underrepresented.

Research methodology

We used qualitative and quantitative survey methods to gain a better understanding of this diversity of professional situations and the psychosocial risks associated with them. The first part of the survey thus consists of a questionnaire-based investigation phase, which aims to provide a quantified overview of work-related challenges. 163 questions have been asked, both open and closed. They cover twelve themes that help to identify specific situations within the merchant navy, while offering the possibility of comparing the results with those of other studies relating to occupational psychosocial risks. Responses from 745 people were collected, split between 686 men and 55 women² (a high response rate, which speaks to the level of interest sparked by the survey). Let us be clear - the breakdown by gender of our sample reflects this masculinised profession: very strongly imbalanced.

In a second step, interviews were conducted to better understand the lived reality and sensitive experiences surrounding these challenges and the forms of violence suffered. Twenty-six interviews with five women and twenty-one men were conducted in 2016 with several

1. It was carried out within the framework of the 2015 study agreement (project no. 2) concluded between the Institute of Economic and Social Research (Ires) "at the service of representative organisations of workers" and the General Confederation of Labour (Confédération générale du travail, CGT). It benefited from the invaluable help of several institutions and professionals including, among others, the doctors of the Seafarers' Health Service, shipping companies, the Maritime Institute of Accident Prevention, Marc Lorient and Émile Provendier.

2. Four questionnaires not completed.

categories of people: sailors and former sailors of the merchant navy, HR managers in various sectors - towing, port, ferries and ships stopping off in France - and trade union officials.

The data collected was supplemented by ethnographic observations on board ships. In this way, we have been able to understand the variety of challenges and risks to which sailors are exposed, but also the risks they themselves create for their colleagues.

Influence of environmental and organisational factors on occupational psychosocial risks

The ship: a high-risk (physical) work environment

Among the factors likely to impact work activity, climatic conditions constitute major "physical" risks and it is bad weather which makes daily tasks considerably more complicated. Indeed, a capricious sea affects the physical and mental condition of sailors in various ways: the reduction of and changes to sleep, appetite and mood (irritability, motivation) are the first consequences of changeable weather.

Heat stress is also responsible for physical challenges. Working in the heat (in the engine room) or in the pouring rain or the cold poses a risk to the health of sailors (fatigue, loss of dexterity), and these conditions favour accidents (falls or slips on wet ground).

The physical risks of the shipping trade also include noise caused largely by ship vibration. It should also be noted that maritime transport is one of the sectors of activity that is particularly exposed to chemical risks, particularly on oil tankers or tankers transporting gas or chemicals. In everyday life, and despite the presence of detectors and the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE), contact (skin) with corrosive cleaning products or inhalation of toxic fluids constitute major risks to the health of sailors.

One of the other risks associated with working on a ship is sailing through areas frequented by maritime pirates (Horn of Africa, Gulf of Aden and Benin, Nigeria, Southeast Asia, Strait of Malacca, etc.). Their attacks range from looting of cargoes to kidnapping and targeted shootings. Equipped with more and more sophisticated weapons and equipment, sailors are no less afraid of these situations of intense stress during passage or berthing in these risk areas. To these factors must be added the risk of accidents related to certain dangerous situations (delicate docking manoeuvres, heavy load shifting, heavy traffic). Remoteness from health facilities - the distance from the ship to a rescue and relief centre - is an additional stress factor.

Significant physical constraints: type of tasks, pace of activity and organisation of working hours

While the automation of the ships has relieved the sailors of having to perform the toughest tasks, the nature of sailing remains extremely physical. On the bridge as well as at the engine, the handling, the carrying of heavy loads, the operation of machinery, the numerous movements

in a restricted and moving medium and finally the use of professional tools, machinery or equipment call for movements, postures and efforts of unrivalled physical intensity.

The pace of activities performed by sailors is also specific: work effort concentrated over a longer or shorter period is required depending on the shipping sector involved (from a few days to several months). According to our results, it is the sailors who sail less than one straight month who report feeling physical fatigue the least frequently. Beyond this period, and especially among sailors on long journeys, the feeling of general fatigue tends to set in during the time spent at sea.

The work on board ships is all the more difficult because it is organised, most of the time, by shifts (four-hour work periods) and is carried out at night by some of the sailors. For those who do not benefit from genuine periods of recovery, fatigue, caused by nights that are (too) short in terms of sleep, poses serious problems with regard to vigilance and safety. Finally, it is the body of the sailor as a whole - due to sleep disorders to digestive disorders, to cognitive disorders (memory, language) - which is mistreated by these staggered and atypical schedules.

Intensification of work paces on board commercial vessels

The imperative of productivity and economic profitability is a watchword staunchly respected in the merchant navy. Each maritime expedition is a real race against the clock where loss of time represents a waste of money. Curtailing the time devoted to the loading and unloading of goods supports this process of accelerating the pace of work.

The primacy bestowed upon this commercial logic constrains and intensifies the pace of work, which generates fatigue and stress in sailors. In order to arrive on time and meet multiple requirements (regulatory, administrative, commercial), sailors regularly work at a quick pace. The overload of work carried out with reduced manpower leads sailors to perform regular overtime which is not compensated by rest periods. The administrative expenses resulting from security management are mainly caused by exceeding the prescribed times. This arsenal of regulations - we are not judging their relevance here - which has ballooned over the years has seriously negative effects on the subjective experience of the work of sailors, creating a sense of incompleteness and an impression of "doing poor work" even though the priority for sailors is to carry out a maritime expedition in complete safety. These situations involving high work intensity can generate stress, psychological tension, and even, in the most extreme cases, cardiovascular diseases.

Paces of work that are problematic for family and personal life

The repeated and prolonged absence from home is one of the characteristics of the seafaring profession which can make it particularly challenging to have familial, marital or personal balance. "Missing" important family occasions, such as weddings, births, funerals, parties with

the family or with friends, or simply being absent from everyday life, weighs on sailors. A third of them express a sense of unease related to absence.

Time lags at sea often continue ashore. The return home is not without some "readjustments", whether these are physiological or conjugal: in fact, the arrival of the sailor tends to disrupt the routines and the habits instilled by the spouse and children.

This challenge linked to the specificity of the pace of activity is all the less well supported as the loading and unloading schedules vary. The increase in working hours, and subsequent unpredictability thereof, is problematic in terms of the physical and mental state of sailors, on the one hand, and for the management of family and domestic time, on the other hand. Staying at sea beyond scheduled dates contravenes temporal flexibility outside work, which is one of the reasons sailors choose this profession. For more than three quarters of sailors, recovery is done during the holidays ashore. Postponing the date of disembarkation means postponing rest and thus drawing even more from reserves partially dried up by work which becomes, as we have seen, particularly demanding. In this context, it is easier to understand why sailors retrain ashore more or less quickly during their career for an activity that will allow them to better balance work and family and preserve (in part) their physical and psychological health.

Physical and psychological violence at work in the merchant navy and the phenomena of addiction

Long-term isolation at sea, combined with living with individuals who do not share similar lifestyles and cultures, and with different relationships to violence and labour relations, presents an objective risk of professional or interpersonal conflict. Thus, working and living in a closed and confined space, for a shorter or longer duration, is generally cited as a factor that increases the risk of occurrence of violence and hostile behaviour. In this regard, women were almost five times more likely than men to say that the origin of hostile behaviour to which they are subjected is related to their gender. Generally, this violent behaviour takes various forms: in particular, verbal abuse, physical abuse and/or sexual abuse.

Verbal abuse: an indicator of this professional environment "based on gender"

Overall, when it comes to verbal abuse, the men and women who participated in the survey said that they are exposed in a similar way. The criterion of distinction lies more in the nature of these attacks since they are predominantly based on gender. Thus the insults most often made towards men call into question their virility while those uttered against women question their sexual probity.

The survey also shows that the position in the occupational hierarchy is a factor that clearly accentuates the risks of exposure to verbal aggression. For both men and women, officers are much more exposed than their colleagues in the category of operational personnel. While respondents most often report that assaults originate from their supervisors, the importance of

the role of customers in the occurrence of verbal abuse must be emphasised for sailors on passenger ships. Many members of crews associated with the hospitality industry report the lack of consideration with which they are regularly treated by customers.

Physical violence on board

The population most affected by physical violence relating to fights is the category of operational personnel. There are twice as many acts of physical violence as in the officer category. The results also show that women are significantly less likely than men to have been involved in this type of situation. The population interacting with passengers/customers is particularly impacted by scenes of physical violence and many examples were reported to us during the investigation. These acts of violence are particularly brutal and even endanger the physical (and moral) integrity of these workers.

Sexual abuse: high exposure of women

In the merchant navy, as in many other professional sectors, the expression of sexual violence can take many forms.. In a work group historically dominated by men, sexual abuse usually takes verbal forms: from sexist jokes to dirty jokes, from references to the body to comments about the sexual abstinence imposed by life at sea, from implicit propositions to those that are more explicit, sexual abuse can also take non-verbal forms. The kind of violence most often directed against women includes the display of pornographic images in the various workspaces on board (on computers or the bridge), or even in the form of desktop wallpaper for computers, groping, physical provocations or exhibitionism, or the theft of underwear from the launderette on board. In this survey, more than one third of women reported having been the victim of such abuse. Men in this professional sector are not exempt from this type of assault: one tenth of them also reported having been subject to sexual abuse at work. In the most extreme cases, these assaults extend to attempted rape and actual rape. Even if no woman taking this survey reported having been raped (a result that can be assumed to be under-reported, as is often the case in investigations dealing with this topic), three men claim to have been a victim.

Unhappiness and stress, themes particularly present on board

The theme of unhappiness took on a prominent role in the survey: for both men and women, nearly three-quarters of respondents said they felt this feeling, to varying degrees of intensity, as part of their job; officers more than operational personnel. Among the factors causing this state of affairs, we find, as we have already pointed out, the hindrance to maintaining family ties. Next, it is the work atmosphere which is cited as the factor contributing the most to the emergence of unhappiness. Stress, generally related to the numerous situations categorised as involving risk: manoeuvres, bad weather, sinking, collisions, etc., also acts as an aggravating factor. In addition, the strategic reorganisations of companies, dismissals, reduction of activity due to strong competition, refocusing of activity around the sole economic criterion, sale of the

company, etc., generate uncertainty and concern, and start to have a negative impact on the social climate on board, often explaining, too, the unhappiness felt by employees.

Alcohol and use of psychoactive substances

As part of our survey, we wanted to ask sailors about the social perceptions relating to their consumption of alcohol and/or psychoactive substances. In general, the results show that more than half of sailors sail on so-called "dry" ships. When alcohol is permitted, large disparities are observed in the means of controlling its consumption. Between trust in self-management and attempts at regulation through the enactment of rules, tolerance remains subjective and varies from one ship to another. Moreover, this survey indicates that most respondents are in favour of a "dry" vessel, with women being more in favour of this than men. The difference is much greater if one looks at the variable according to hierarchy. Here, operational personnel are much more in favour of this measure than officers (a difference of almost 15 points).

Despite this majority support for dry vessels to become the norm, many consider this measure to be insufficient. The "dry ship" is far from convincing in terms of its effectiveness and it almost three quarters of respondents report that even on ships where it is prohibited, alcohol remains a problem. Several respondents even claim to have observed the introduction of alcohol trafficking.

Food

Several interviews have highlighted the health risks related to the quality of food when embarked on long voyages. The ingestion of low-quality food, or even food that carries the risk of bacterial contamination and exposes these professionals to the risks of poisoning, preoccupies the sailors, all the more so because the majority of them are accustomed to "eating well". In addition, several interviews have indicated the significance of problems with obesity in this professional sector. Conscious of gaining weight on board, sailors denounce the lack of variety of products offered to them. Interviews conducted with the cooks have also revealed a lack of training in major dietary principles for a certain number of them - particularly for those whose main role is something else, as is often the case in shipping.

Recommendations and avenues for research

The study report concludes with a series of recommendations and new avenues of research are drawn up with a view to improving the working and living conditions of sailors in maritime transport. It therefore seems to us essential to start work on the following points:

- Improve measures to prevent chemical risks on board ships and further train personnel in collective and individual protection measures;
- Provide psychological support for sailors crossing areas prone to activity by pirates;
- Conduct an in-depth analysis of the risks associated with pace of work in staggered shifts and/or at night;

- Ensure that working hours and hours of rest are respected by increasing human resources and regulating the workload;
- Adhere to dates of boarding and disembarking, and improve transparency with regard to leave times (mainly general service personnel);
- Reduce the factors leading to workplace discomfort by placing the human being at the heart of the work organisation;
- With the help of supervisors, engage in a work analysis approach with the aim of fostering dialogue between management and all employees on board;
- Offer specific training for employees in contact with passengers (at all professional levels);
- Give greater consideration to the issues of workplace equality by paying attention to the conditions for promotion and to the career paths of women;
- Promote the equality of "territories of the ship" by erasing the gendered character of these areas and having them revert to being neutral professional spaces. To do this, care should be taken to remove from common work spaces any image or object of a sexual nature that constantly evokes the masculine and gendered character of these spaces;
- Make staff aware of the violence and discrimination to which they may be subjected within the working environment. This may involve providing reminders of the types of violence that may be subject to sanctions and their definitions. These reminders could be incorporated into the internal rules on board and posted in each cabin of the employees;
- Concerning the on-board consumption of psychoactive substances (tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, medicine, etc.), we can only encourage the continuation of the sensitisation work already being undertaken by the Seafarers' Health Service in this regard. Moreover, it appears in our interviews that the provision of tools to measure consumption (alcohol in particular) is welcomed by sailors;
- With regard to food on board ships, in addition to ensuring a minimum quality of the products (and their preservation), it would be advisable to train more people in charge of cooking in basic dietary principles. If necessary, companies could use the skills of dieticians to develop various menu suggestions to be given to cooks.

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