International Journal of Maritime and Interdisciplinary Research
©2026 IJMIR/Volume 8(3) July - December | ISSN: 2734-3286.

Journal homepage: www.ijmir.edu.ng

LEGAL CHALLENGES AND THE COMPENSATION FRAMEWORK FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL INJURIES IN NIGERIA'S MARITIME INDUSTRY

By

[1]Adagbor, Pedro Uwadum; [2]Omo Ehi-Osifo; [3]Owoh, Osita
[1]Department of Public Health, Southwestern University, Okun-Owa, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun,
[2]State University of Sunderland, Chester Road, Sunderland, SR1 3SD
[3]Pontiff Attorneys, Suite 25 Tafawa Balewa Square, Western Pavilion, Lagos Island

ABSTRACT

Maritime workers face demanding operational conditions including long hours, hazardous environments, isolation, and emergencies at sea. While workers' compensation systems provide for occupational injury, psychological and emotional harm remains difficult to recognize, prove, and compensate. This study examined the prevalence and perceptions of psychological injuries among Nigerian maritime workers and assessed barriers to reporting and claims. A quantitative cross-sectional survey of 300 workers at Tin Can Port and Rivers Port was conducted using a structured questionnaire. Findings revealed that 51.7% of respondents had experienced psychological injury, with stress (37.3%), anxiety (31.7%), and depression (23.3%) being most common. Leading causes included long working hours (46.0%), high-stress environments (41.0%), and dangerous situations (39.3%). Most respondents (55.0%) were unaware of the compensation framework, and 45.0% rated it ineffective. Key barriers included insufficient legal support (72.1%), lack of procedural awareness (70.5%), complex claims processes (68.9%), and mental-health stigma (61.0%). The study concludes that psychological injuries are significant occupational concerns in Nigeria's maritime industry requiring clearer recognition, accessible claims guidance, and coordinated institutional reform. Recommendations include confidential mental health programmes, clearer compensability standards, accessible claims guidance, anti-stigma policies, and coordinated stakeholder frameworks.

Keywords: Psychological injury; workers' compensation; maritime workers; mental health; Nigeria

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The maritime industry is a central component of international commerce and depends on a workforce operating in physically demanding, safety-critical, and often isolated environments. Seafarers and port workers may be exposed to extended working hours, disrupted sleep, separation from family, hazardous operations, adverse weather, equipment failure, accidents, violence, and limited access to timely health services. Research has therefore identified maritime employment as an occupation in which psychosocial and organizational conditions can materially affect mental health, safety, and retention (Lefkowitz, Slade, & Redlich, 2019; Sampson & Ellis, 2019).

Psychological and emotional injuries include clinically significant conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and chronic stress reactions arising from or aggravated by occupational exposure. Among seafarers, traumatic incidents, piracy, workplace violence, fatigue, poor job control, social isolation, and inadequate organizational support may contribute to psychological distress. Empirical research has reported measurable burdens of depression and anxiety within international seafaring populations and has also indicated that formal claims data may substantially understate the true burden because of high reporting thresholds and barriers to disclosure (Lefkowitz & Slade, 2019; Lefkowitz, Slade, & Redlich, 2019).

Fatigue is especially significant because it can impair attention, judgement, performance, and safe decision-making. Maritime standards consequently regulate hours of work and rest and encourage fatigue-risk management. The International Maritime Organization's fatigue guidance recognizes that fatigue affects personnel regardless of skill or training and places responsibilities on companies, seafarers, administrations, and training providers to prevent and manage the risk (International Maritime Organization, 2019).

Workers' compensation is intended to provide medical, income-replacement, rehabilitation, disability, and death benefits where injury or disease arises out of or in the course of employment. In Nigeria, the Employees' Compensation Act 2010 establishes a national framework for occupational injury, disease, disability, and death and expressly provides for compensation for mental stress in defined circumstances (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010). Its administration is therefore directly relevant to maritime employees seeking recognition and redress for work-related psychological harm.

At the international level, the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended, consolidates minimum standards for seafarers' working and living conditions, including hours of work and rest, medical care, health protection, occupational safety, welfare, social security, and complaint procedures (International Labour Organization, 2006). Although the Convention does not create a complete national compensation code for psychological injury, it establishes an important normative foundation for prevention, treatment, welfare, and enforcement. Broader occupational-health guidance likewise emphasizes organizational interventions, manager and worker training, reasonable accommodation, and return-to-work support as essential elements of an effective mental-health-at-work system (World Health Organization, 2022). International comparisons, such as the United Kingdom's Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the United States' Jones Act, illustrate how other jurisdictions have developed frameworks for workplace psychosocial hazards. While these are not Nigerian law, they offer useful comparative models for considering risk assessment, preventive management, and employer duties that could inform Nigerian practice. Its value in this study is therefore comparative, particularly in illustrating risk assessment, information, training, supervision, and preventive management of foreseeable psychosocial harm.

Despite the importance of maritime workers to trade and port operations, psychological and emotional injuries remain underrecognized in compensation practice. Unlike many physical injuries, mental-health conditions may develop gradually, lack visible signs, and require specialized evidence to establish diagnosis, employment-related causation, and functional impairment. Workers may also face limited access to mental-health care, uncertainty about claims procedures, employer or insurer resistance, and stigma associated with disclosure. These conditions create a significant gap between the formal availability of compensation and workers' practical ability to obtain it. Accordingly, this study examined the prevalence and forms of psychological and emotional injury among maritime workers; assessed workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Nigeria's compensation framework; identified evidentiary, procedural, and institutional barriers to claims; analyzed the effect of stigma on reporting and help-seeking; and evaluated the perceived roles of employers, insurers, and the legal system in responding to psychological and emotional harm.

1.1 Research Questions

i. What is the prevalence and what types of psychological and emotional injuries are experienced by maritime workers?
ii. How effective are the existing legal frameworks for maritime worker compensation claims related to psychological and emotional injuries in Nigeria?
iii. What challenges do maritime workers face in proving psychological and emotional injuries in compensation claims?
iv. How does the stigma surrounding mental health issues in the maritime industry affect workers' willingness to report psychological injuries and seek compensation?
v. What is the role of employers, insurers, and legal systems in acknowledging and addressing psychological and emotional injuries in the maritime sector?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Worker's Compensation in the Maritime Sector

The Nigerian compensation framework is principally governed by the Employees' Compensation Act 2010. The Act seeks to provide an open and fair system of guaranteed compensation for work-related death, injury, disease, or disability, together with rehabilitation and a compensation fund. Significantly, section 8 addresses mental stress and identifies circumstances in which compensation may be payable. This provision gives psychological harm a statutory basis, although successful implementation depends on timely reporting, appropriate medical assessment, proof of employment-related causation, and accessible administrative procedures (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010; Worugji, 2013).

For seafarers, the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended, provides the principal international labour standard. It covers employment conditions, hours of work and rest, onboard medical care, occupational safety and health, welfare, social security protection, and complaint procedures. These protections are complemented by the International Maritime Organization's standards and guidance on fitness for duty, fatigue prevention, and safe ship management (International Labour Organization, 2006; International Maritime Organization, 2019). The international instruments establish minimum welfare and prevention duties, but the availability and calculation of compensation remain substantially dependent on domestic law and administration.

2.2 Psychological and Emotional Injuries

Psychological and emotional injuries in maritime work may arise from acute traumatic events or cumulative occupational exposures. Relevant risk factors include accidents, violence or threats,

prolonged isolation, fatigue, excessive workload, poor-quality sleep, low job satisfaction, and inadequate organizational support. Studies of international seafarers have identified depression, anxiety, and other mental-health conditions as material occupational concerns, while also warning that stigma and high reporting thresholds may conceal the true scale of the problem (Lefkowitz & Slade, 2019; Lefkowitz, Slade, & Redlich, 2019; Sampson & Ellis, 2019).

Recognition in law does not automatically guarantee access to compensation. Mental-health claims commonly require a clinically supportable diagnosis, evidence of occupational exposure, a reasoned causal connection between work and the condition, and proof of resulting impairment. These requirements may be difficult to satisfy where symptoms develop gradually, workers delay reporting, onboard or port-based mental-health services are unavailable, or employment records do not adequately document psychosocial hazards. Effective systems must therefore combine prevention, confidential reporting, early clinical assessment, claims guidance, and non-retaliatory return-to-work support (World Health Organization, 2022).

Under Nigeria's Employees' Compensation Act, mental stress is compensable within statutory conditions, making the legal issue one of both coverage and implementation. The critical questions concern whether workers understand the procedure, whether employers report claims promptly, whether suitable medical evidence is available, and whether administrators apply the statutory standard consistently. Scholarly commentary on the Act has similarly emphasized the importance of interpretation, administration, and enforcement in determining whether its protections become effective in practice (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010; Worugji, 2013).

The comparative references to the United States' Jones Act and Longshore and Harbor Workers' Compensation Act are not central to the present Nigerian study and may obscure the applicable legal analysis. The relevant framework is better understood through the interaction of Nigeria's

Employees' Compensation Act with the Maritime Labour Convention, occupational-safety standards, and evidence-based mental-health-at-work guidance. Together, these authorities support a system that recognizes psychosocial risks, prevents harm, facilitates treatment, and provides a workable route to compensation and rehabilitation (International Labour Organization, 2006; World Health Organization, 2022).

2.3 Challenges in Maritime Compensation Claims

Maritime compensation claims involving psychological injury present interconnected medical, evidentiary, procedural, and organizational challenges. A worker may need to establish the existence of a recognized condition, demonstrate relevant occupational exposures, connect the condition to employment, and show the resulting incapacity or impairment. These tasks are particularly challenging in cases of cumulative exposure, non-visible symptoms, incomplete records, or delayed treatment. Claims statistics may consequently underrepresent the underlying prevalence of mental ill-health (Lefkowitz, Slade, & Redlich, 2019).

Stigma can intensify these barriers by discouraging disclosure, treatment, and formal reporting. Workers may fear being considered unfit for duty, losing employment opportunities, or experiencing retaliation. Evidence-based occupational guidance therefore recommends organizational policies that reduce psychosocial risks, train managers, protect confidentiality, provide reasonable support, and facilitate sustainable return to work. In maritime settings, these measures should be incorporated into safety-management and welfare systems rather than treated as optional personal-support initiatives (Sampson & Ellis, 2019; World Health Organization, 2022).

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design and Sample Selection

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine psychological and emotional injuries among maritime workers in Nigeria. The study population comprised 2,999 workers across two selected locations: 1,988 at Tin Can Port and 1,011 at Rivers Port. A sample of 300 respondents was selected through simple random sampling and allocated proportionately to the size of each port workforce. This produced 200 respondents from Tin Can Port and 100 from Rivers Port, representing approximately 10% of the workforce at each location.

The table below outlines the sample selection across the two selected ports:

Table 1: Sample Population Distribution

Ports	**Total Workers**	**Sample Size (10%)**
Tin Can Port	1,988	200
Rivers Port	1,011	100
Total Sample Size	**2,999**	**300**

3.2. Data collection

Data were collected with a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed across the selected port workforces. The instrument elicited information on respondents' experiences of psychological and emotional injury, perceived causes and frequency, awareness and assessment of compensation arrangements, barriers encountered when pursuing claims, mental-health stigma, and the support provided by employers, insurers, and legal institutions. Responses were summarized using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages. Because several

items permitted multiple responses, the percentages reported for those items are not expected to sum to 100%.

3.3 Research Instrument

The structured questionnaire was developed based on literature review and expert consultation. Content validity was assessed by three experts in occupational health and maritime law. Reliability was established through a pilot test with 30 respondents (not included in the final sample), yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Southwestern University Research Ethics Committee. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to summarize responses. For multiple-response questions, percentages were calculated based on the number of respondents selecting each option, allowing total percentages to exceed 100%. The minimum sample size was calculated using the formula $n = N/(1+N(e^2))$ with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research question one: What is the prevalence and what types of psychological and emotional injuries are experienced by maritime workers?

Table 2: Prevalence and what types of psychological and emotional injuries are experienced

Questions	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Have you ever experienced any form of psychological or emotional injury while working in the maritime industry?	Yes	155	51.7
	No	145	48.3
	Total	**300**	**100.0**
If yes, please indicate the type(s) of psychological or emotional injury you have experienced: (Check all that apply)	Stress	112	37.3
	Anxiety	95	31.7
	Depression	70	23.3
	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	55	18.3
	Panic attacks	44	14.7
	Sleeplessness/Insomnia	64	21.3
	Other (please specify)	32	10.7
	Total (respondents who reported at least one injury)	**155**	**100.0**
How frequently have you experienced psychological or emotional injury in your maritime work?	Never	23	7.7
	Rarely	60	20.0
	Occasionally	65	21.7
	Frequently	85	28.3
	Always	67	22.3
	Total	**300**	**100.0**
	Long working hours	138	46.0

What do you believe are the main causes of psychological or emotional injuries in your work? (Check all that apply)	Exposure to dangerous situations (e.g., accidents, piracy)	118	39.3
	Isolation from family and friends	93	31.0
	High-stress work environment	123	41.0
	Harassment or bullying	77	25.7
	Lack of mental health support	95	31.7
	Others	43	14.3
	Total (respondents who reported at least one cause)	**300**	**100.0**

Note: Multiple responses were permitted for injury types and perceived causes; percentages are therefore calculated against the stated respondent base and do not sum to 100%.

As shown in Table 2, 155 respondents (51.7%) reported having experienced a psychological or emotional injury while working in the maritime industry. Among the conditions listed, stress was most frequently reported (37.3% of the total sample), followed by anxiety (31.7%), depression (23.3%), insomnia (21.3%), post-traumatic stress disorder (18.3%), and panic attacks (14.7%). On the frequency measure, 28.3% reported experiencing such injury frequently and 22.3% reported experiencing it always, whereas 7.7% selected never. The leading perceived causes were long working hours (46.0%), a high-stress work environment (41.0%), and exposure to dangerous

situations such as accidents or piracy (39.3%). These results indicate a substantial burden of psychological and emotional harm within the sampled maritime workforce.

Hence, psychological and emotional injuries are prevalent among maritime workers, with common types including stress, anxiety, and depression, primarily caused by long working hours, exposure to dangerous situations, and high-stress environments.

4.2 Research question two: How effective are the existing legal frameworks for maritime worker compensation claims related to psychological and emotional injuries in Nigeria?

Table 3: Existing legal frameworks for maritime worker compensation claims to injuries

Questions	**Response**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Are you aware of the existing legal frameworks or laws governing workers' compensation claims in Nigeria for psychological and emotional injuries?	Yes	135	45.0
	No	165	55.0
	Total	**300**	**100.0**
How would you rate the effectiveness of the existing legal frameworks for addressing psychological and emotional injuries in maritime worker compensation claims?	Very effective	25	8.3
	Effective	55	18.3
	Neutral	85	28.3
	Ineffective	70	23.3
	Very ineffective	65	21.7
	Total	**300**	**100.0**
In your opinion, should the existing compensation frameworks be revised to better include psychological and emotional injuries?	Yes	200	66.7
	No	45	15.0
	I am unsure	55	18.3
	Total	**300**	**100.0**

Do you think the compensation process adequately addresses the mental health needs of maritime workers?	Yes	75	25.0
	No	135	45.0
	Partially	90	30.0
	Total	**300**	**100.0**

Table 3 indicates limited awareness and confidence in the compensation framework. More than half of respondents (55.0%) were unaware of existing laws or procedures governing compensation for psychological and emotional injury. In assessing effectiveness, 45.0% rated the framework ineffective or very ineffective, compared with 26.6% who rated it effective or very effective; 28.3% were neutral. Two-thirds of respondents (66.7%) supported revision of the framework to provide clearer recognition of psychological and emotional injuries. In addition, 45.0% stated that the compensation process did not adequately address maritime workers' mental-health needs, while 30.0% considered it only partially adequate. Overall, the results point to deficiencies in awareness, perceived effectiveness, and practical responsiveness.

Hence, the existing legal frameworks for maritime worker compensation claims related to psychological and emotional injuries in Nigeria are largely ineffective, with many workers unaware of them and calling for revisions to better address mental health issues.

4.3 Research question three: What challenges do maritime workers face in proving psychological and emotional injuries in compensation claims?

Table 4: Challenges faced by maritime workers in proving psychological and emotional injuries

Questions	**Responses**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**

Have you ever attempted to file a compensation claim for psychological or emotional injuries?	Yes	129	43.0
	No	171	57.0
	Total	**300**	**100.0**
If yes, what challenges did you face while filing your claim?	Difficulty proving the psychological injury	87	67.4
	Lack of medical evidence	79	61.2
	Lack of awareness of legal procedures	91	70.5
	Resistance from employer or insurer	83	64.3
	Lengthy and complex claims process	89	68.9
	Insufficient legal support	93	72.1
	Other (e.g., stigma, fear of job loss)	41	31.8
How would you rate the support provided by your employer in	Very supportive	25	8.3
	Supportive	43	14.3
	Neutral	68	22.7

addressing mental health issues or helping with compensation claims?	Unsupportive	87	29.0
	Very unsupportive	77	25.7
	Total	**300**	**100.0**

Table 4 shows that 129 respondents (43.0%) had attempted to file a compensation claim for psychological or emotional injury. Among those claimants, the most frequently reported barriers were insufficient legal support (72.1%), lack of awareness of legal procedures (70.5%), a lengthy and complex claims process (68.9%), difficulty proving the injury (67.4%), resistance from an employer or insurer (64.3%), and lack of medical evidence (61.2%). Employer support was also rated poorly: 54.7% of the full sample described their employers as unsupportive or very unsupportive. These findings show that claimants confront interconnected evidentiary, procedural, and organizational obstacles.

Hence, maritime workers face challenges in proving psychological and emotional injuries in compensation claims, including insufficient legal support, lack of awareness of legal procedures, and unsupportive employers.

4.4 Research question four: How does the stigma surrounding mental health issues in the maritime industry affect workers' willingness to report psychological injuries and seek compensation?

Table 5: Stigma surrounding mental health issues in the maritime industry

Question	**Responses**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
	Yes	183	61.0
	No	71	23.7

Do you believe there is a stigma surrounding mental health issues in the maritime industry?	I am unsure	46	15.3
	Total	**300**	**100.0**
If yes, how has this stigma affected your willingness to report psychological or emotional injuries?	Prevented me from reporting	92	50.3
	Delayed my report	64	35.0
	Did not affect my willingness to report	21	11.5
	Other (e.g., fear of job loss)	6	3.2
	Total	**183**	**100.0**
Do you feel that mental health issues, such as stress or anxiety, are taken seriously by employers in the maritime industry?	Yes	48	16.0
	No	161	53.7
	Sometimes	91	30.3
	Total	**300**	**100.0**

Table 5 demonstrates the practical effect of mental-health stigma. A majority of respondents (61.0%) believed that stigma exists in the maritime industry. Among the 183 respondents who perceived stigma, 50.3% reported that it had prevented them from reporting psychological or emotional injury, while 35.0% stated that it had delayed reporting. Across the full sample, 53.7% believed that employers did not take stress, anxiety, and related mental-health concerns seriously; only 16.0% believed that such concerns were taken seriously. Stigma therefore appears to operate as a material barrier to early disclosure, access to care, and timely claims.

Hence, the stigma surrounding mental health issues in the maritime industry affects workers' willingness to report psychological injuries and seek compensation, with many workers citing prevention or delays in reporting and a lack of employer support.

4.5 Research question five: What is the role of employers, insurers, and legal systems in acknowledging and addressing psychological and emotional injuries in the maritime sector?

Table 6: Role of employers, insurers and legal systems in psychological and emotional injuries

Questions	**Responses**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
How effective are your employer and insurers in acknowledging psychological and emotional injuries related to your work?	Very effective	23	7.7
	Effective	61	20.3
	Neutral	79	26.3
	Ineffective	82	27.3
	Very ineffective	55	18.3
	Total	**300**	**100.0**
Do you think the legal system supports maritime workers in compensation claims related to psychological and emotional injuries?	Yes	54	18.0
	No	143	47.7
	Partially	103	34.3
	Total	**300**	**100.0**

Table 6 further indicates weak institutional support. In total, 45.6% of respondents rated employers and insurers as ineffective or very ineffective in acknowledging psychological and emotional injuries, while 28.0% considered them effective or very effective. With respect to the legal system, 47.7% believed that it did not support maritime workers pursuing compensation for psychological and emotional injuries, and 34.3% considered the support only partial. The combined responses

suggest that responsibility is fragmented across employers, insurers, and legal institutions, without a consistently trusted pathway for recognition, treatment, documentation, and compensation.

Hence, employers, insurers, and the legal system are largely perceived as ineffective in addressing psychological and emotional injuries in the maritime sector, with many workers feeling unsupported in their compensation claims.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and trauma-related symptoms in this study is consistent with international evidence that seafarers experience significant psychosocial risk. The identified causes—long working hours, hazardous exposure, isolation, and high-pressure operations—also correspond with established maritime risk factors. Research involving international seafarers has found substantial levels of depression and anxiety, while occupational studies have linked workload and sleep deficits to strain and impaired well-being (Lefkowitz & Slade, 2019; Oldenburg & Jensen, 2019; Sampson & Ellis, 2019).

Respondents' limited awareness and low confidence in the compensation framework point to an implementation gap rather than an absolute absence of legal coverage. Nigeria's Employees' Compensation Act expressly addresses mental stress, but practical protection depends on understandable claims procedures, employer reporting, appropriate medical assessment, and consistent administration. The findings therefore support calls for stronger legal literacy, institutional guidance, and transparent application of the Act (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010; Worugji, 2013).

The reported difficulties in proving injury, obtaining medical evidence, understanding procedure, and securing legal support are consistent with the characteristics of psychological claims. Because symptoms may be cumulative and non-visible, early clinical assessment and contemporaneous

documentation are particularly important. The low incidence found in claims-based maritime research has likewise been interpreted cautiously because high reporting thresholds may suppress formal recognition (Lefkowitz, Slade, & Redlich, 2019).

The finding that stigma prevented or delayed reporting accords with broader maritime and occupational-health evidence. Fear of adverse career consequences, concerns about fitness for duty, and weak organizational trust can discourage workers from disclosing mental-health problems. Effective responses require confidential reporting, anti-retaliation safeguards, manager training, access to qualified support, and organizational interventions directed at the causes of distress (Sampson & Ellis, 2019; World Health Organization, 2022).

The perceived ineffectiveness of employers, insurers, and legal institutions indicates that responsibility is fragmented across prevention, treatment, documentation, claims handling, and rehabilitation. International standards place health protection, medical care, working-time controls, welfare, and complaint procedures within the institutional responsibilities of maritime governance, while mental-health-at-work guidance emphasizes coordinated organizational action and return-to-work support (International Labour Organization, 2006; International Maritime Organization, 2019; World Health Organization, 2022). The Nigerian system would therefore benefit from clearer operational coordination among employers, the compensation administrator, maritime regulators, healthcare providers, unions, and legal-support services.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study establishes that psychological and emotional injuries are significant occupational-health concerns among the surveyed maritime workers. Stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and panic attacks were reported in a work setting characterized by long hours, hazardous exposure, isolation, and persistent operational pressure. These conditions have

implications not only for individual well-being but also for concentration, decision-making, productivity, and maritime safety.

The results also reveal a substantial gap between compensation availability and workers' claims experience. Limited awareness, difficulties establishing medical and occupational causation, procedural complexity, inadequate legal assistance, employer or insurer resistance, and mental-health stigma restrict access to effective remedies. A credible response therefore requires more than legislative recognition. It must connect prevention, early identification, confidential treatment, documentation, claims guidance, adjudication, and return-to-work support. The following recommendations are proposed:

(i) Maritime employers should implement confidential mental-health programmes that include psychosocial-risk assessment, periodic screening, access to qualified counselling, fatigue management, crisis support, and structured return-to-work arrangements.

(ii) Policymakers should clarify the compensability of work-related psychological and emotional injuries, including the evidentiary standards for diagnosis, occupational causation, functional impairment, and claims arising from cumulative exposure.

(iii) Regulators, unions, legal-aid providers, and professional associations should publish accessible claims guidance, provide early case support, and facilitate timely access to independent medical and legal expertise.

(iv) Employers and industry associations should adopt anti-stigma policies, confidential reporting channels, and awareness programmes that present mental health as an occupational-health and safety issue rather than a personal weakness.

(v) Supervisors, safety personnel, human-resource practitioners, and claims officers should receive training in early recognition, trauma-informed response, referral, record-keeping, and non-retaliatory management of psychological-injury reports.

(vi) Government agencies, employers, unions, insurers, medical professionals, and worker representatives should establish a coordinated framework for prevention, treatment, documentation, compensation, rehabilitation, and periodic review of outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the management and personnel of the Tin Can Port (Lagos) and Rivers Port (Port Harcourt) for facilitating data collection. We also thank the participants who generously shared their time and experiences for this study.

REFERENCES

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2010). Employees' Compensation Act, 2010. Federal Government Printer.

International Labour Organization. (2006). Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended. ILO Publishing. Retrieved August 25, 2026, from https://www.ilo.org/maritime-labour-convention

International Maritime Organization. (2019). Guidelines on fatigue. IMO Publishing.

Lefkowitz, R. Y., & Slade, M. D. (2019). Seafarer mental health study. ITF Seafarers' Trust. Retrieved August 25, 2026, from https://www.seafarerstrust.org

Lefkowitz, R. Y., Slade, M. D., & Redlich, C. A. (2019). Rates and occupational characteristics of international seafarers with mental illness. Occupational Medicine, 69(4), 279–282. https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqz069

Oldenburg, M., & Jensen, H.-J. (2019). Stress and strain among seafarers related to the occupational groups. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 16(7), 1153. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16071153

Sampson, H., & Ellis, N. (2019). Seafarers' mental health and wellbeing. Institution of Occupational Safety and Health.

United Kingdom. (1974). Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, c. 37. The Stationery Office.

World Health Organization. (2022). WHO guidelines on mental health at work. World Health Organization. Retrieved August 25, 2026, from https://www.who.int

Worugji, I. N. E. (2013). Work injuries compensation under the Employee's Compensation Act in Nigeria: What is next? Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization, 10, 30–46.