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| IALA Guideline |

G tbd

guidance for dealing with stress and trauma in vts operations

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Revisions to this document are to be noted in the table prior to the issue of a revised document.

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# introduction

The mental well-being of personnel is a critical component in professions operating in high-stress environments where safety of human lives and infrastructure is in focus. In VTS-operations the VTSO:s are frequently tasked with making complex decisions based on traffic, weather and other factors, whilst under pressure.

The decisions can be made under intense pressure, for a long period of time. There is also a risk for the VTSO to witness or being involved in traumatic events (distress situations). These factors underscore the need for targeted guidance and support programs.

# purpose of this document

The purpose of this Guideline is to provide information on addressing the challenges associated with stress and trauma in VTS-operations. It recognizes that mental health is vital for maintaining operational effectiveness, fostering a strong safety culture, and supporting the long-term well-being of VTS-personnel.

The objectives of this guideline are to:

* *Example 1 TBD*
* *Example 2 TBD*

The development of this Guideline is driven by a compelling need to address the recognition that stress and trauma have profound implications for mental health, particularly within the workplace. The unique nature of VTS-operations demands tailored support systems to ensure personnel can recover and thrive following stressful and traumatic events. This guideline seeks to empower VTS-providers with tools and thoughts to foster resilience, build a supportive work environment, and enhance the overall safety and effectiveness of maritime traffic management.

By addressing these objectives, this guideline will contribute to creating sustainable framework for managing stress and/or trauma in VTS-operations. With a focus on ensuring that VTSO:s are supported not just in their professional capacities, but as individuals whose well-being is valued and prioritized.

This document focuses on the stress and trauma experienced during work or working periods. While we acknowledge that stress and trauma can also occur outside of work, we have chosen to concentrate on the aspects related to the workplace.

## Relationship to other iala documents

This guidance should be read in conjunction with all IALA recommendations and guidelines specifically related to VTS and in particular:

* *G1171 Human factors and ergonomics in VTS*
* *Example 2*

*IMO Documents:*

* *Guidance on fatigue mitigation and management (MSC/Circ.1014)*
* *Guidelines on fatigue (MSC/Circ.1598)*
* *TBD*

# document structure

This document consists of three parts:

* Part A sets out the general influencing factors for stress and trauma;
* Part B provides more general guidance on detecting and evaluating stress and trauma;
* Part C identifies methods for raising awareness and addressing mental well-being in VTS operations.

# PART A INFLUENCING FACTORS FOR STRESS AND TRAUIMA

## Description on stress and trauma

Stress and trauma will be described individually, focusing on different levels of stress and trauma.

### Stress

Details on stress; a state that you are in, that will affect your focus & your work.

### Different levels of stress

#### Long-term stress

Explanation

#### Acute stress

Explanation

#### Vicarious stress

Explanation (Stress received from others) / “Secondary stress”

#### Chronic stress

While there are good types of stress, there are also, of course, negative and harmful forms of stress, otherwise known as chronic stress. Chronic stress happens when we repeatedly feel inescapable stressors, such as being unhappy at home, feeling constantly overwhelmed at work or dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. And while eustress is critical to fulfilment, even too much of it can lead to chronic stress if a person finds themselves overloaded with little to no restorative downtime.

Explanation

#### Good stress

“ Good stress is called “[eustress](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-you-need-to-know-about-eustress-3145109#:~:text=The%20excitement%20of%20a%20roller,to%20have%20in%20our%20lives.),” and you may be more familiar with it as a feeling of excitement or eagerness. For example, you may have felt eustress when starting a new job, getting married, traveling, engaging in physical exercise or even riding a rollercoaster.” -> we need stress to get things done.

#### “No stress state”

It can be dangerous when nothing is happening.

### Trauma

Details on trauma (long-term)

#### Acute trauma

Comes from a single, unexpected and stressful event

#### Chronic trauma

Comes from repeated traumatic events

#### Complex trauma

Involves multiple different kinds of traumatic events that combine to create unique trauma symptoms.

#### Vicarious trauma *(Secondary trauma?)*

Is the emotional and psychological impact experienced by individuals who are exposed to the traumatic experiences of others, often through empathetic engagement or prolonged involvement in their care or support.

The most common types of trauma; found [here](https://www.sandstonecare.com/blog/types-of-trauma/)

* “Acute trauma” – also known as Type 1 trauma
  + Witnessing violence
  + Crime or accidents
  + Natural disasters
  + Suicide attempt
  + Violent or sexual assault
  + Life-threatening illness or serious injury
  + The traumatic loss of a loved one, or someone close to you
* Traumatic events
  + Childhood abuse
  + Domestic violence
  + Neglect
  + Attachment trauma
  + Bullying
  + Emotional, physical, verbal or sexual abuse
  + Religious trauma
  + Overly strict upbringing

## How fatigue differs from stress and trauma

Mention “good stress” and “bad stress”, and the difference between them.

## Influencing factors in general

Short briefing on influencing factors, both for stress and trauma.

### External factors

Short briefing on external factors that affect this matter.

#### In stress

#### In trauma

### Internal factors

Short briefing on internal factors that affect this matter.

#### In stress

#### In trauma

# Part B detecting and evaluating stress and trauma

## Identification and evaluation

Examples on how stress and trauma can be identified, and how others can evaluate the level of stress and/or trauma. Stress and trauma must be defined and separated from each other.

Identification and evaluation need to be separated from each other, they are two different things.

## Coping with stress and trauma

Examples on how the individual affected can cope with stress and trauma, and on how others can assist and/or help.

## Evaluation process

Tools to evaluate the level of stress and/or trauma. Examples on what to do in different situations, based on the level experienced. Different situations/scenarios need to be defined. -> Swiss pocketknife, 50 in 1?

Various approaches: Mention different methods for approaching the problem / evaluating it. -> Port of Antwerp had an presentation on this topic during VTS-56 (using heart rate monitors etc).

* *Technological methods (heart rate monitors / body temperature monitors etc).*
* *Different surveys to the VTSO:s*
* *Engineering methods, physiological methods, psychological methods.*

## Available support

Mention of occupational health, different support groups (international providers?). Institutional support (professional assistance).

The available help might differ between different member-states, this needs to be taken into consideration.

## Precautions

Mentioning risks of stress and trauma, as well as indirect stress/trauma (experienced by the group).

The cost, and effects of stress and/or trauma will be mentioned, references to a global level.

* Needs to be mentioned that the stress might not be work-related. [Finnish statistics](https://www.kela.fi/ajankohtaista/mielenterveysongelmat-veivat-jo-yli-100-000-suomalaista-pitkalle-sairauspoissaololle-vuonna-2023)

# Part c methods for raising awareness and addressing mental well-being in vts-operations

## introduction to mental health training

Short introduction to what mental health training means

## benefits of mental health training

Data collected from different studies

## “Boreout” / Staying focused

Mentioning the “boreout” syndrome, and the risks of VTSO:s having to little to focus on at the same time. It’s the opposite of stress, but it can lead to the same thing. [Finnish link](https://www.ttl.fi/en/topical/press-release/boredom-at-work-can-make-you-sick#:~:text=Boredom%20at%20work%20is%20associated,which%20can%20predict%20health%20problems.)

Mention monotony, Lorena has information on this from the Supervisors course held in Argentina. -> study made in Korea ~10 years ago, more stressful to have close to zero traffic, in comparison to having a lot of traffic.

Mention the specific situation where the VTSO finds him/herself in a situation that does not “give enough”, this will not automatically lead to a “boreout”. It’s a risk if the VTSO:s are not interested in their work, and if they don’t find it fulfilling, it will affect the result. The end-result of this might be the “boreout”, where you lose the worker / where the worker will lose interest in the job.

## General cases/situations that might evolve to a stressful situation

Discuss if this list should be included or not during VTS-57

* Everyday stress vs. special situations where you have to perform under a lot of stress.

## resources available

Most common used methos globally, links/mentioning?

“Trust person” within the organisation, that people can talk to if they feel the need for it. All discussions are confidential, and the person is trained for the task. -> first line service, to give the possibility to talk to everyone.

Debriefing sessions mentioned, and parts of these explained (reference to appendix)

### How to address stress and trauma

Insert text

### Things that can be done

Mention the small elements that contribute in a positive manner to this; focusing on working equipment, working in a dark space vs light space, having chairs/tables etc that are ergonomic. Environment of the worker -> Terveystalo checks this in Finland, try to see if there is any information available on this.

Relationships & influences on working with different organisations etc. (for example VTS vs. Pilots / VTS vs. Ports / VTS vs. Vessels). Try to look into different socioeconomical differences (does salaries have an effect?)

# abbreviations

NGO non-governmental organization

VTS Vessel Traffic Services

VTSO Vessel Traffic Service Operator

The list should be typed in alphabetical order. The text automatically aligns as an indented paragraph until carriage return is hit and then the next term can be entered.

# references

References are sources directly referred to in the running text and should be given a sequential number, starting at 1. The reference number should be included as close to the referenced text as possible and included as a number within square brackets.

The reference should be listed in the References section in the following syntax using the **Reference** **list** style:

[Author surname,] <space> [initial.] <space> [year] <space> [title.]

For example:

“Hawking also suggests ways that quantum mechanics can be combined with the theory of special relativity [1]. This text builds on his discussion of the instability of black holes described in *A Brief History of Time* [2].”

should be included in the reference list as follows:

1. Hawking, S. (2001) The Universe in a Nutshell.
2. Hawking, S. (1988) A Brief History of Time.

The **Reference list** style will add a number for the reference as soon as you start typing the text and the paragraph will automatically align with the first line of text. Press return to enter a new reference in the list.

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TBD

1. debriefing sessions

To be filled out