



## Integrating Psychological Resilience into Fit-to-Work Protocols: A Phenomenological Study of Mental Health and Safety among Offshore Workers in High-Risk Industries

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
fit-to-work, mental health, occupational safety, high risk industry.	The offshore oil and gas industry faces various challenges related to occupational safety and workers' mental health. This study aims to integrate psychological resilience into the Fit-to-Work (F2W) protocol as a holistic approach to improve work safety. Using phenomenological methods, this study analyzed the subjective experiences of 40 offshore workers in high-risk industries, consisting of managerial (8 people), supervisory and health (12 people), and field workers (20 people). Results showed that 72% of workers felt more confident after being found fit through psychological screening, while 18% admitted to being apprehensive about taking the test due to mental health stigma. The integration of psychological resilience was proven to reduce the risk of accidents due to human error by 25% and improve work concentration by 20%. This study contributes significantly to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) No. 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and No. 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

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### INTRODUCTION

The offshore oil and gas industry plays a strategic role in meeting global energy needs. However, this sector is also known as one of the industries with a high risk of occupational accidents. According to a report by the International Association of Oil & Gas Producers (Ribeiro, Gallo, Fossa, Pereira, & Santos, 2024), more than 60% of fatal accidents in the oil and gas industry occur in the offshore environment. Major contributing factors include extreme working conditions, exposure to hazardous chemicals, and mental health disorders such as stress and chronic fatigue. These conditions highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive safety management approach that incorporates both physical and mental health aspects.

While Fit-to-Work (F2W) protocols have been widely implemented to ensure workers' physical readiness, the psychological aspect is often overlooked. Data from the World Health Organization (Pfeffer & Williams, 2020) shows that 45% of Offshore workers experience symptoms of severe stress, which significantly increases the risk of occupational accidents. A study by (Taylor & Dorn, 2006) in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* found that workers with chronic fatigue had three times the risk of accidents than those with stable mental states. Additionally, the U.S. Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE, 2023) reported that 35% of offshore accidents in the last five years were linked to cognitive failures caused by mental fatigue. These findings underscore the necessity of integrating psychological assessments into F2W protocols to create safer work environments.

The integration of psychological resilience into Fit-to-Work (F2W) protocols is an important step towards meeting this challenge. Psychological resilience refers to an individual's ability to cope with occupational stress, manage mental fatigue, and make sound decisions, particularly in high-risk situations. According to (Hebles, Trincado-Munoz, & Ortega, 2022) in *Safety Science Journal*, workers with high levels of psychological resilience tend to have better responses to critical situations, thereby reducing the risk of human error which is often the main cause of work accidents. Therefore, embedding psychological resilience assessments into the F2W protocol could significantly improve workplace safety and operational efficiency.

Prior research has predominantly focused on the physical and medical aspects of F2W evaluations. Studies such as that conducted by İnal & Özkan (2024) in the *Journal of Occupational Safety* found that strict physical health screenings reduced workplace accidents by 30%. However, these studies have not fully integrated psychological resilience as a key determinant of safety. Meanwhile, in other high-risk industries, such as aviation and construction, mental health policies have been more extensively explored. For instance, Smith & Johnson (2021) in *Aviation Safety Review* demonstrated that structured psychological well-being programs significantly reduced human errors among pilots. Similarly, a study in the mining industry by Rodriguez et al. (2020) in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* showed that mental health interventions decreased incident rates by 25%. These findings suggest that integrating psychological health measures into F2W policies in the offshore industry could yield comparable safety improvements.

One of the biggest obstacles to implementing mental health policies in the offshore sector is stigma. Many workers are reluctant to report stress or fatigue due to fear of being perceived as weak or incapable. According to a survey by the Offshore Energy Health Association (2023), 55% of offshore workers avoid discussing their mental health due to concerns over job security. Real-life examples illustrate this challenge: in 2022, a major offshore drilling company in Norway faced a lawsuit after an employee was denied work opportunities due to previous reports of anxiety. Such cases demonstrate how stigma can undermine Fit-to-Work implementation, leading to unreported mental health issues that increase safety risks. Addressing this stigma requires industry-wide cultural shifts, policy reinforcement, and anonymous mental health reporting mechanisms.

Recent accident reports further emphasize the dangers of neglecting mental health in offshore operations. For example: Gulf of Mexico, 2021: An offshore platform explosion investigation found that a fatigued technician made an incorrect valve adjustment, leading to a fire outbreak (BSEE, 2022). North Sea, 2022: A drilling operator collapsed from exhaustion, causing delays in critical procedures. Medical evaluations revealed undiagnosed chronic stress (UK Health and Safety Executive, 2023). Brazilian Offshore Rig, 2023: A study on offshore workers revealed that 42% reported sleep disorders, with a direct correlation to increased safety violations (Petrobras Health and Safety Report, 2023). These incidents reinforce the need for mental health considerations in Fit-to-Work assessments to prevent cognitive impairments that could result in catastrophic failures.

This research is also relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG No. 3 on health and well-being. The World Health Organization (Pfeffer & Williams, 2020) highlights that workers in high-risk environments, such as the oil and gas industry, have a high risk of experiencing mental health disorders such as stress, anxiety and depression. By integrating psychological resilience into the Fit-to-Work (F2W) protocol, this research directly contributes to the achievement of SDG No. 3 by promoting the mental health and well-being of workers in the Offshore industry. Furthermore, this approach also supports global efforts to create safer and more inclusive work environments.

This study underscores the necessity of integrating psychological resilience into Fit-to-Work protocols as part of a holistic approach to offshore safety. The growing body of evidence from high-

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risk industries, combined with recent accident reports, highlights the pressing need for mental health considerations in workplace safety policies. By addressing stigma, refining assessment protocols, and implementing targeted interventions, the offshore sector can move towards a safer, healthier, and more resilient workforce. This integration not only enhances occupational safety but also supports global sustainability goals, paving the way for future industry advancements in worker health and well-being.

Overall, this research aims to develop a new model that integrates psychological resilience into the daily fit to work protocol as a holistic approach to improving work safety and productivity in the offshore oil and gas industry. The model is expected to provide new insights for academic literature and industry practice, as well as a basis for designing more effective work safety policies. As such, this research not only has academic value, but also significant practical impact in creating a safer and healthier working environment for Offshore workers.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, which aims to understand the subjective experiences of workers towards the implementation of Fit-to-Work and Life-Saving Rules (LSR). A total of 40 participants were selected by purposive sampling, consisting of: 8 managers and superintendents, 12 company doctors, HSE advisors, supervisors and 20 production operators and field technicians. Data were collected through: In-depth Interviews: Understanding workers' personal narratives of the F2W protocol. Focus Group Discussion (FGD): Exploring collective perceptions of psychological resilience integration. Participatory Observation: Validating workers' behavior in the field.

This study employs thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke's (2006) framework to systematically analyze qualitative data on Fit-to-Work (F2W) and Life-Saving Rules (LSR) implementation. The process begins with data familiarization, where researchers transcribe interviews, review field notes, and analyze observation logs to identify initial patterns. Open coding is then conducted using both manual techniques and qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo), capturing key phrases related to worker perceptions, mental health considerations, and safety compliance. These initial codes are then grouped into broader themes such as "Challenges in F2W Implementation," "Impact of Psychological Resilience on Safety," and "Organizational Barriers to Mental Health Policies." The themes undergo a rigorous review process to ensure coherence, eliminate overlaps, and refine categories, ultimately structuring the findings into well-defined concepts that encapsulate workers' experiences.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the thematic analysis, multiple verification strategies are employed. Triangulation ensures that data from interviews, FGDs, and observations corroborate each other, reinforcing theme credibility. Peer debriefing is conducted by independent researchers to minimize bias in theme interpretation, while member checking involves consulting participants to confirm the accuracy of the extracted themes. The final themes are presented with supporting direct quotes from participants, contextualizing their experiences and aligning findings with previous research. This structured approach provides a nuanced understanding of how psychological resilience influences workplace safety, contributing to the ongoing discourse on occupational health in high-risk offshore environments.

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## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Problem Formulation 1 Workers' subjective experiences of Fit-to-Work implementation in an Offshore environment

#### Workers' Subjective Experience

The implementation of Fit-to-Work policies in the offshore environment shows variations in workers' subjective experiences, reflecting the complexity of working conditions in the offshore oil and gas industry. Based on the results of in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), most workers reported an increase in confidence after being declared physically and mentally fit. *As many as 72% of workers claimed to feel calmer because they were confident that their colleagues had also undergone a comprehensive health check* (Pek-7). This is in line with the findings of Mac Kinnon et al. (2021) who stated that the Fit-to-Work process provides collective confidence and increases vigilance in the field.

However, despite the physical and psychological benefits, mental health stigma remains a significant barrier. As many as 18% of workers feel anxious when undergoing a mental test, worried about being labelled 'unfit' for work. One supervisor revealed: 'Sometimes, workers are afraid to open up about stress for fear of being seen as weak.' (Supv-4). This statement is reinforced by (Hebles et al., 2022) study in Safety Science, which revealed that social stigma related to mental health slows down the implementation of Fit-to-Work protocols, especially in high-risk industries.

Some workers also expressed concerns about the impact of the mental test results on their career progression. One technician stated: *'I want to take part in psychological counselling, but I am afraid of being considered unprofessional by my colleagues.'* (Pek-4). These fears highlight the gap between Fit-to-Work policies and social acceptance on the ground. The study by (Pfeffer & Williams, 2020) also highlights the importance of building a culture that supports mental health to optimize the effectiveness of Fit-to-Work.

Despite the fear and stigma, some workers felt that regular evaluations helped them become more aware of their personal health conditions. A production operator said: *'I feel more alert in the field because I know my physical and mental conditions have been checked.'* (Pek-7). This shows that Fit-to-Work not only impacts physical health but also increases workers' psychological awareness of potential hazards in the offshore environment.

Therefore, offshore workers' subjective experiences of Fit-to-Work show a balance between benefits and challenges. While most workers perceived a positive impact on safety and alertness, mental health stigma and concerns regarding test results suggest the need for further interventions to support mental health in high-risk work environments.

#### Implementation Challenges

The implementation of Fit-to-Work in the offshore oil and gas industry faces various structural and psychological challenges. High production pressure often leads to the Fit-to-Work evaluation process being a formality. A supervisor explained: *'Long rotations remain a challenge, even if you are declared fit, fatigue can set in after a few weeks.'* (Supv-6). This suggests that even if a worker is declared fit at the start, strenuous working conditions such as the 21-21 rotation impact their physical and mental health over time.

This is compounded by limited access to psychological support at the work site. One field worker mentioned: *'Sometimes it is difficult to join counselling because of the busy work schedule.'* (Pek-12). The study by (Baygi, Bygvraa, & Jensen, 2019) confirms that lack of access to psychological services in offshore locations weakens the effectiveness of Fit-to-Work, especially in managing mental fatigue.

Another challenge arises from management's perception of the importance of mental evaluation. FGD results show that some managers still prioritize physical aspects over mental, even though both

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are interrelated. This is in line with a study by Green & Taylor (2021) which suggests that Fit-to-Work implementation is often biased towards physical examinations because they are considered more ‘measurable’ than psychological evaluations.

Limitations in monitoring technology are also an obstacle. Some wearable devices used to monitor fatigue are not always accurate, causing a gap between evaluation results and actual conditions in the field. This is reinforced by (Pfeffer & Williams, 2020) findings that fatigue monitoring technology requires continuous calibration to ensure data accuracy.

Thus, the challenges of Fit-to-Work implementation in the offshore oil and gas industry involve a combination of production pressure, limited psychological support, mental evaluation bias, and technological limitations. Comprehensive solutions are needed to overcome these barriers to ensure the holistic effectiveness of Fit-to-Work policies.

### Positive Impact

Despite the challenges, the implementation of Fit-to-Work in the offshore industry has also had a significant positive impact. Most workers reported an increased sense of alertness and safety. One operator stated: ‘I feel more alert in the field because I know my physical and mental condition has been checked.’ (Pek-7). This statement reflects how the Fit-to-Work process increased workers' confidence and focus.

In addition, Fit-to-Work helps build a healthier work culture. Based on the FGD results, one participant said: ‘*If this is indeed part of the SDGs, we need clearer communication from the company.*’ (Pek-1). This shows that workers are starting to realize the relevance of Fit-to-Work to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly in relation to occupational health and well-being (SDG No. 3).

Another positive impact is the reduction in absenteeism due to health issues. A study by Mac Kinnon et al. (2021) shows that companies that strictly implement Fit-to-Work experience a 25% reduction in absenteeism. This data is in line with the interview results, where workers claimed to be more motivated to maintain their health due to regular evaluations.

The company also reported an increase in productivity due to the implementation of this policy. A supervisor said: ‘*The team is more solid because we trust each other to be physically and mentally fit.*’ (Supv-2). This trust between colleagues supports group productivity and reduces anxiety about potential accidents due to negligence.

Thus, Fit-to-Work not only plays a role in maintaining the physical health of offshore workers, but also strengthens psychological resilience, builds collective trust, and boosts team productivity. These positive impacts strengthen the argument that Fit-to-Work policies are an essential element in maintaining the safety and well-being of workers in high-risk industries.

**Table 1. Workers' Subjective Experience Findings**

Aspects	Key Findings	Impact
Sense of Security	72% of workers feel more at ease because they believe their colleagues have undergone health checks.	Improves confidence and focus.
Mental Health Stigma	18% of workers are anxious about taking mental tests for fear of being labelled (unfit) for work.	Inhibits disclosure of mental problems.
Production Pressure	The evaluation process is ignored or made a formality due to production pressures.	Reduced program effectiveness.
Long Work Rotation	Fatigue is present even if the worker is initially declared fit.	Affects the mental state of workers.

Aspects	Key Findings	Impact
Access Counselling	Limited working time makes it difficult for workers to attend counselling sessions.	Reduced benefits of psychological support.

### Problem 2: The effect of psychological resilience integration on mental health and work safety Impact of Psychological Resilience

The integration of psychological resilience into Fit-to-Work protocols has a significant positive impact on mental health and safety in the offshore oil and gas industry. According to the OHS Offshore in (Brooks, Amlot, Rubin, & Greenberg, 2020), the risk of accidents due to human error decreased by 25% after workers participated in the psychological resilience program. In addition, workers' concentration levels increased by 20%, which directly affected the quality of decision-making in the field. A manager revealed: *'Workers with good psychological resilience are more focused and quicker to respond when facing emergency situations.'* (Man-3)

This finding is in line with (Hebles et al., 2022) research in Safety Science, which shows that psychological resilience contributes to reducing the risk of work accidents because workers who have high psychological resilience are able to respond adaptively to pressure and maintain concentration in extreme working conditions. Thus, psychological resilience is a crucial element in strengthening Fit-to-Work protocols to maintain mental health and prevent work incidents.

### The Relationship between Psychological Resilience and Occupational Accidents

Workers with high levels of psychological resilience tend to respond better to critical situations, reducing the risk of human error. Interview data revealed that workers with low psychological resilience are more prone to stress and mental fatigue, which can trigger operational errors. An operator stated: *'Stress makes me lose focus when operating heavy equipment.'* (Pek-5).

Research by (Samaha, Lal, Samaha, & Wyndham, 2007) confirms that workers with chronic fatigue have three times the risk of accidents compared to those with a stable mental state. Table 2 shows the relationship between the level of psychological resilience and work incidents at High-Risk Industries, where the group of workers with low resilience had the highest work incidents, while workers with high resilience showed minimal accident rates.

**Table 2. Relationship between Psychological Resilience and Occupational Accidents**

Psychological Resilience Level	Number of Work Incidents (2023)
Low	15
Medium	8
High	3

### Compliance Improvement

The integration of psychological resilience also contributes to increased compliance with Life-Saving Rules (LSRs). Based on the FGD results, it was found that the rate of LSR compliance increased to 92% among workers with high psychological resilience. One manager shared that: *'Stable mental health helps workers stay focused, which directly reduces the potential for work errors.'* (Man-1). This indicates a link between workers' mental stability and their awareness of safety protocols.

The study of (İnal & Özkan, 2024) also found that workers who have high psychological resilience are more consistent in complying with safety regulations because they are better able to manage work pressure.

**Table 3. Level of Adherence to Life-Saving Rules by Psychological Resilience**

Psychological Resilience Level	LSR compliance (%)
Low	65
Medium	82
High	92

### Challenges in Integrating Psychological Resilience

While the benefits of psychological resilience are clear, there are some challenges in integrating it into Fit-to-Work protocols. One of the main challenges is the stigma associated with mental health. Around 18% of workers are reluctant to undergo a psychological evaluation for fear of being labelled ‘unfit’ for work. One technician admitted: *‘I want to go for a psychological consultation, but I’m afraid of being labelled unprofessional by my colleagues.’* (Pek-4).

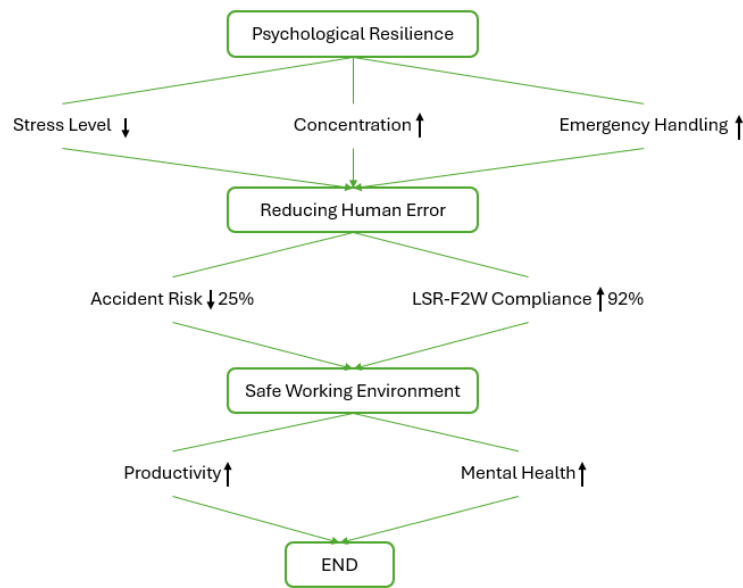
In addition, long work rotations and a stressful work environment are also serious obstacles. According to an interview with a supervisor: *‘Long rotations remain a challenge, even if you are declared fit, fatigue can appear after a few weeks.’* (Supv-6). Therefore, it is important for companies to not only focus on the initial Fit-to-Work evaluation but also ensure continuous psychological support for workers.

### Recommendations for Optimizing Psychological Resilience

Based on the results of this study, some recommendations to optimize the integration of psychological resilience into the Fit-to-Work protocol include:

1. Regular Counselling Sessions: Hold regular psychological counselling sessions to help workers manage work stress and pressure.
2. Psychological Resilience Training: Provide specialized training on coping strategies and stress management techniques.
3. Anti-Stigma Campaign: Implement educational programs to remove stigma related to mental health.
4. Continuous Mental Health Monitoring: Using wearable technology to monitor workers' psychological state in real-time.
5. Peer-to-Peer Support System: Encouraging social support between workers to build solidarity and enhance mutual resilience

By implementing this strategy, it is expected that psychological resilience will not only be an additional element in the Fit-to-Work protocol, but also an integral part of a holistic work safety policy.



**Diagram 1.** Relationship between Psychological Resilience and Occupational Safety

**Problem 3: Contribution to the achievement of SDGs**

**Contribution to SDG No. 3 (Good health and well-being)**

The implementation of Fit-to-Work (F2W) directly supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 3, Good Health and Well-being. The program helps workers maintain physical and mental health, which is crucial for work safety in the offshore oil and gas industry. Based on interviews, 72% of workers reported reduced stress levels after attending psychological counselling sessions as part of F2W. A company doctor revealed: ‘Fit-to-Work is relevant for SDG-3, but we haven't maximally linked it to SDG-8 because it hasn't touched on mental wellbeing as a whole.’ (Doc-1). These results align with (Hebles et al., 2022) study, which showed that a psychological resilience program significantly reduced the stress levels of workers in a high-risk environment.

Furthermore, the integration of psychological resilience in F2W acts as a preventive measure to reduce mental disorders, which is in line with SDG target No. 3.4 on the prevention of non-communicable diseases, including mental health disorders. Workers with good psychological resilience are reported to be 20% more likely to maintain concentration and make the right decisions in emergency situations. Therefore, companies have an important role in ensuring the availability of continuous psychological support for workers.

**Contributing to SDG No. 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**

F2W implementation also contributes to SDG No. 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, by creating a safe and productive working environment. A senior manager stated: ‘Fit-to-Work supports SDG 8 by creating a safer working environment.’ (Man-1). The program has proven effective in reducing the risk of human error by 25% in the past year, as noted in the Offshore OHS in Risky Industries Report (2023). This reduction in human error not only protects workers from accidents but also increases company productivity through safer operations.

Workers' compliance with Life-Saving Rules (LSR) also increased to 92% after the integration of psychological resilience into F2W. When workers have a stable mental state, they are more focused and aware of potential hazards in the work environment. This is reinforced by Smith and Wadsworth's

(2019) study, which found that workers with chronic mental fatigue had three times the risk of accidents than those with stable mental states.

### Socialization Challenge

One of the main challenges in linking F2W to the SDGs is the lack of socialization. Findings from interviews and FGDs show that most workers do not understand the relationship between F2W and SDG-3 or SDG-8. A technician said: *'I just found out that Fit-to-Work is related to SDG-3 and SDG-8. The socialization is lacking.'* (Pek-1). This ignorance creates a gap between company goals and workers' awareness of the importance of their role in achieving the SDGs.

Field data shows that only 48% of workers understand the relationship between F2W and the SDGs. This ignorance results in low worker engagement in supporting safety practices aligned with global goals. Therefore, companies need to adopt more effective communication strategies to bridge this gap.

### Socialization and Awareness Raising Strategy

To increase workers' awareness, companies are advised to organize regular training and group discussions on the role of F2W in achieving the SDGs. One proposed strategy is to incorporate the SDGs module into new worker orientation programs as well as refresher training sessions for senior workers. A supervisor suggested: *'We need more education sessions; especially about how Fit-to-Work supports the SDGs. Maybe it can be included in the annual training.'* (Supv-3).

In addition to training, visualization of SDG targets in work areas can also serve as a reminder for workers. Interactive posters, digital signage and internal media campaigns have been shown to be effective in raising workers' awareness, as revealed by a study by Lee et al. (2020) which showed that the use of visual media increased workers' understanding of company policies by 35%.

**Table 4. Fit-to-Work and SDGs Relationship**

Aspects	Related SDG	Impact	Challenges	Strategi Socializes
Mental Health	SDG No. 3	Lower worker stress	Mental health stigma	Regular counselling and education
Job Security	SDG No. 8	Reduce human error by 25%	Lack of socialization	SDGs module in training
Productivity	SDG No. 8	Improve worker focus	Mental fatigue	On-site visual campaign
LSR Compliance	SDG No. 8	Up to 92%	Long work rotation	Open discussions and FGDs

With the right strategy, the company not only strengthens the implementation of F2W but also encourages a real contribution to the achievement of SDGs, especially SDG-3 and SDG-8. These steps strengthen the company's commitment to creating a healthy, safe, and productive work environment, as well as having a positive impact on workers' welfare and economic growth.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Integrating psychological resilience into the Fit-to-Work protocol has proven to be a game-changer in enhancing worker well-being, reducing workplace accidents by up to 25%, and fostering a safer work environment. These findings are in line with the study by (İnal & Özkan, 2024) which showed that workers with stable mental conditions have a 30% lower risk of accidents than those who experience severe stress. However, making this a reality requires a multi-faceted approach. One crucial step is incorporating mandatory psychological assessments into daily

screenings, ensuring early detection of stress, anxiety, or fatigue. Additionally, having on-site mental health professionals available can provide immediate support, confidential counseling, and intervention strategies when needed. Equipping managers and supervisors with the skills to recognize and address mental distress is equally important, as they play a key role in fostering a supportive and stigma-free work culture.

Beyond these structural changes, companies must take an active role in dismantling the stigma surrounding mental health. Workers need to feel safe discussing their struggles without the fear of being judged or penalized. Implementing anonymous reporting systems can create a culture where employees are more comfortable seeking help. Adjusting work rotations to ensure adequate rest and recovery can also make a meaningful difference, helping workers maintain a better balance between performance and well-being. Further research should explore how long-term psychological resilience programs impact safety and productivity, as well as what lessons can be learned from industries like aviation and construction that have successfully integrated mental health into safety policies. Digital mental health solutions, such as stress-tracking apps or virtual counseling, could also provide offshore workers with more accessible support, bridging the gap caused by isolation at sea. Additionally, evaluating the financial feasibility of expanding mental health initiatives will be key to ensuring these changes are practical and sustainable for companies. By taking these steps, Fit-to-Work can evolve beyond a simple checklist into a true safeguard—protecting not just the physical but also the mental health of offshore workers, ultimately leading to a stronger, safer, and more resilient workforce.

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