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Risk, Society, and Bureaucratic Accountability:

A Cross-Case Synthesis of Maritime Accidents in South Korea and Russia

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to critically evaluate the sinking of the MV Sewol and the CS Bulgaria to determine key latent failures, lessons learned, and risk accountability. This inductive study combines pragmatism with a cross-case synthesis method and computer-assisted content analysis using the Atlas.ti software package. This study critically evaluated the MV Sewol sinking at Jodo-myeon, South Korea on April 16, 2014, and the sinking of the CS Bulgaria at Tartarsan, Russia, July 10, 2011 using a cross-case synthesis method. Computer-assisted content analysis resulted in 21 codes which were clustered into four categories and one core theme, namely latent failures. These findings inform five recommendations for isomorphic learning, additional disaster-specific education, training provision and oversight, enhanced vessel monitoring and inspection, and legal clarification of risk accountability.

KEYWORDS

Bureaucratic Accountability, CS Bulgaria, Maritime Accidents, MV Sewol, Risk Society

INTRODUCTION

The environment, society and technology are everchanging. Advances in communications, healthcare, transportation, and other sectors continually alter the societal risk landscape. This state of constant flux inadvertently engenders new and often unforeseen risks necessitating a keen understanding of risk and foresight (Boyd & Wilson, 2020). Modern society's emphasis on performance - often linked to technological advancement - exacerbates risk (Tan et al., 2022). Perrow (1984) writing almost three decades ago, noted an increase in social anxiety caused by perceived exposure to large and

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small risks alike. Covid-19-related mask and vaccine hesitancy suggests that risk perception remains a pertinent concern (Trent et al., 2021).

90% of global trade is transported by sea; this volume will triple by 2050 meaning that the maritime environment is an especially pertinent societal risk (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022). The term risk society, coined by Beck (1992), reflects the emergence of societal risk as the foremost threat to society. The sinking of the Merchant Vessel (MV) Sewol in Byeongpungdo, South Korea in 2014 and the Cruise Ship (CS) Bulgaria in Tatarsan, Russia in 2011 were typified by unethical behavior, illegal vessel modifications and endemic overloading for both convenience and profit. These factors - exacerbated by bureaucracy and the unethical behavior of government officials, owners, captains, and crews - resulted in all too avoidable tragedies that are byproducts of a risk society. Maritime safety will, therefore, remain a critical policy concern (Liss, 2022). Despite the integral nature of risk in society (risk) accountability is a comparatively new focus (Bathke et al., 2022). A precautionary, rather than substantive, procedural approach focused on the legal debate of risks and their respective liabilities - termed risk accountability - was first noted in environmental law (Feintuck, 2005). Broadly speaking, the law is divided into criminal, civil, and administrative regulations; government and private organizations can be subjected to one or all three meaning that liability, in the form of compensation remains a key legal focus (Russell-Brown & Davis, 2016). Public interest in the management of risk is growing. Chernobyl, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and Covid-19 have transformed public and governmental risk perception; thereby, altering the associated bureaucratic accountability (Kim & Kim, 2016). Risk is no longer limited to an individual or societal concern as it is readily acknowledged as a critical governmental policy issue (Keech & Munger, 2015). However, conflict between governmental bureaucratic procedures and emergent post-disaster norms means that preparedness initiatives are often based on false assumptions including those of risk (Supriyono & Danar, 2022). Governments and the public perceive risk differently: the former are physical risk oriented whereas the latter are guided by their perceptions (McConnell & T'Hart, 2019). Consequently, the public may over or underestimate risk meaning that preparedness initiatives based solely on physical risk may not align to the public's perception. Governments must, therefore, consider both physical and perceived risk; it is their duty to understand and address the public's perception of risk as well as managing the physical risk itself (Klinke, 2021). Accordingly, this study contributes to the literature by critically evaluating two maritime accidents - the sinking of the M.V. Sewol and the CS Bulgaria - utilizing pragmatism, cross-case synthesis, and content analysis to inform recommendations for enhanced maritime safety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Risk has been defined in multiple ways. Knight (1921) differentiated between risk and uncertainty, defining risk as situations where the expected probability and response is in accordance with stipulated rules, and uncertainty as lack of clarity regarding the probability of the outcome. Wald (1945) considered risk as a summation of experimentations of anticipated cost and financial reductions from incorrect technical decisions. Kaplan and Garrick (1981) argue that risk implies the possibility of something losing significant value. Wildavsky (1988) defined risk as the probability that an event will occur within a certain period of time or by some stimulus . Alternatively, the US EPA (2021) offers a more pragmatic view of risk as *"the chance of harmful effects to human health or to ecological systems resulting from exposure to an environmental stressor"*. This perspective aligns with the adopted pragmatic approach and is, therefore, utilized herein.

Risk Society

The concept of a risk society was posited by Beck (1992) to reflect the increased post-industrial revolution accumulation of wealth that transformed society. Prosperity was achieved by economic, environmental, and social risk taking to accomplish the desired outcomes meaning that society