

SEAFARER PERSPECTIVES REPORT



Introduction

One of the most important yet demanding jobs are that of a seafarer. A ship crew's contribution to the global economy, trade, and commerce is often overlooked and their diligence and sacrifice unrecognized.

We understand that a seafarer's job is not only physically demanding but also mentally and emotionally straining. Being away from family, friends, and all the familiarity of home for months at a time impacts on an individual's wellness and health. Therefore, we at Transworld Wellness wish to create a program to provide seafarers with the care they deserve.

To implement an evidence-based method, we forwarded our “Perspectives Survey” to numerous seafarers representing a variety of different backgrounds, ranks, and years of experience. Survey questions were structured to investigate their lifestyle, difficulties, needs, as well as views on steps toward improvement.

We present our key findings, survey results, analysis and interpretation, and Wellness Program proposition on this report.

Key Findings

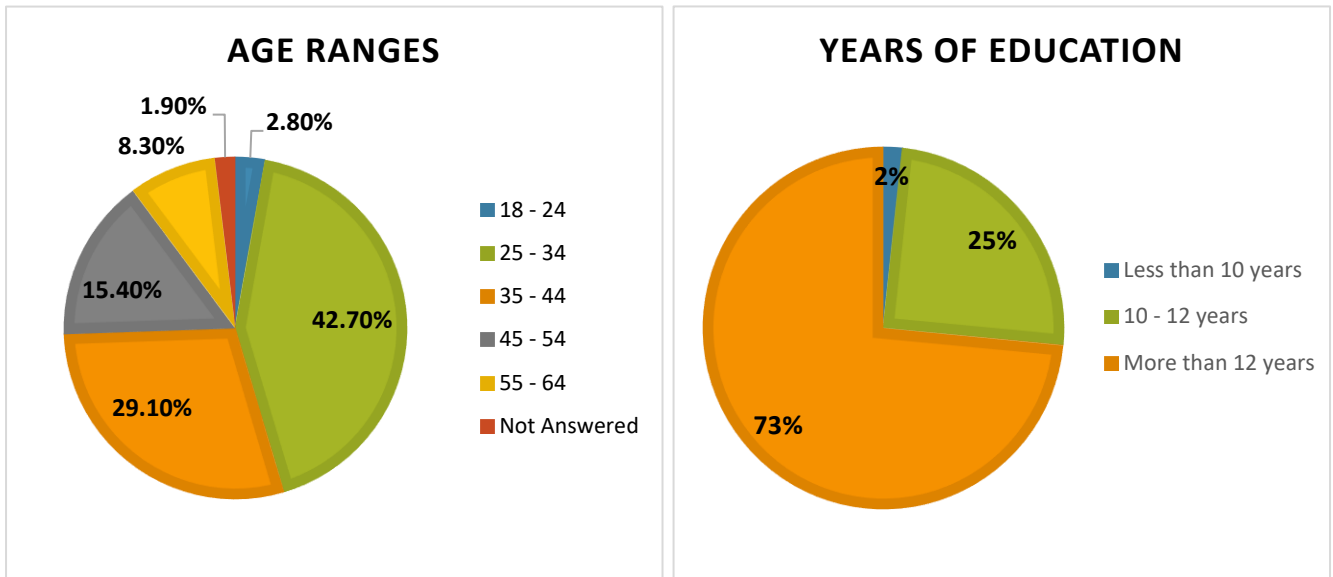
- Survey responses were obtained from a heterogenous sample of 351 seafarers between August 25th – September 25th, 2021.
- Results show that 73% of participants knew of at least one colleague working at sea suffering with mental health concerns. Similarly, 63% knew of at least one of their colleagues at sea struggling with alcohol problems.
- 71% of our seafarer sample reported being aware of and having a good understanding of mental health concepts. While 40% reported that they feel their overall wellness is negatively impacted by their seafaring career.
- There were only 12 out of the 351 responses (3.4%) that were aware of mental health helplines as an available resource.
- Many participants reported that an important avenue of support was interacting with and having good relations with their fellow seafarers on board. Multiple comments emphasised the importance of get-togethers, onboard parties, and team recreational activities to facilitate bonds between crew and create a positive working environment.
- Participants recommended a variety of methods and resources to better support seafarers on board. For instance, group yoga and/or exercise, providing mental and physical wellness training, leadership and anti-harassment training for senior staff, access to counselling, and guided recreational support.
- Results from the points raised in the survey and participant recommendations form the basis for the structure of the Transworld Wellness Program. Please see page 8 for details of the program structure and proposal.

Results

Data was collected between 25th August to 25th September 2021. For participant recruitment and survey circulation, we have interacted with VR Maritime Services, P&I clubs, Maritime Association of Shipowners, Ship Managers, and Agents (MASSA) and Indian National Shipowner’s Association (INSA).

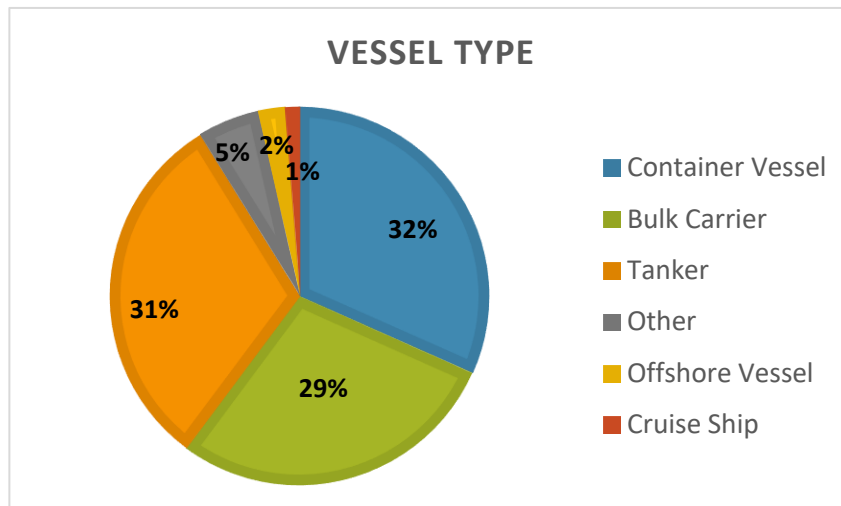
We obtained a total of 351 responses from seafarers either on board, working ashore, or on leave. Most participants were of Indian nationality, but they spoke different languages and represented various cultures from the country. We also had representation from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Burma, and Oman.

Demographics



There was a heterogenous sample in terms of rank and job title, including captain, engineers, abled seaman, deck/engine crew, catering, bosun, cruise ship wait staff, fitters, cadets, etc...

The diagram below shows the different types of vessels that seafarers were working on:



Those in the “other” category above include general cargo, dredger, and ro-ro vessels.

Most of the participants – approximately 80% – had more than 36 months of sailing experience. Whereas 16% reported having 12 to 36 months of sailing experience, 3% had less 12 months and 1.5% had no experience yet.

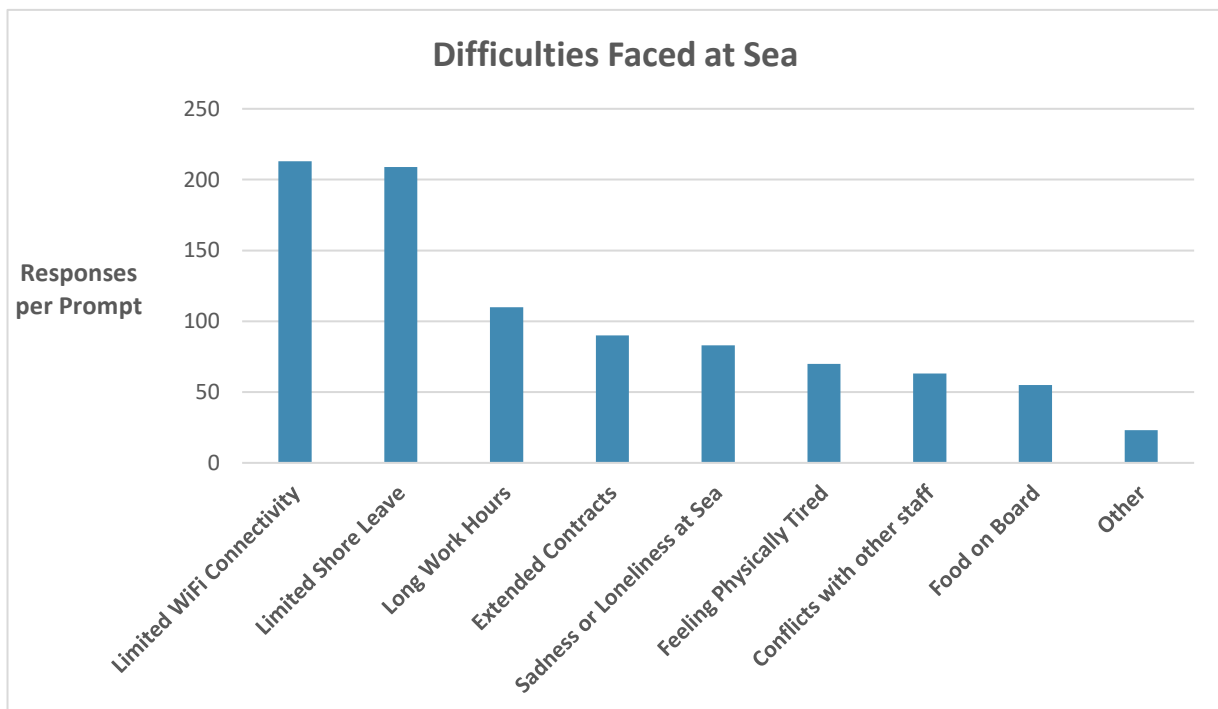
At the time of taking the survey, 24% of participants were not currently sailing (working ashore or on leave). In terms of those on board, 22% were sailing for 6-9 months, 21% were sailing for 3-6 months, and 10% were sailing for 1-3 months. Further, 13% were sailing for 9-12 months and 8.5% was sailing for more than 12 months.

Mental Health Awareness

Results show that 71% of participants had heard of mental health and felt they had a good understanding of the concept. In contrast, about 18% had also heard of mental health but felt that they did not understand it well. 10% of participants said that they had never heard of mental health.

Participants were asked if they knew of any of their colleagues working at sea struggling with mental health concerns. The options given were “None,” “Very Few,” “Some,” “Many,” “All.” As 27% selected none, this indicates that 73% of participants knew of at least one person working at sea suffering with mental health concerns. Similarly, 63% knew of at least one of their colleagues at sea struggling with alcohol problems.

Stressors & Difficulties Faced



Participants indicated multiple issues they face at sea which appear to impact their mental health and well-being.

“Other” concerns raised were the lack of salary increments, inability to pursue hobbies, commercial pressure, erratic work hours because of time zone shifts, and feelings of monotony.

Happiness Index

Participants were asked to rate how happy they were living at sea (10 being most happy). The average score was 7.1. They were also asked to rate how happy they were with their current work (10 being most happy) and the average score was 7.7.

Mental Health Self-Report Ratings

When asked about the frequency of feeling stressed while working at sea, 64% of the participants reported “sometimes” while 7% reported “usually.” Meanwhile, 55% reported experiencing feelings of depression at least sometimes while working at sea. 52% of participants reported feeling nervous and/or worried while working at least sometimes.

Approximately, 42% of the participants stated that they would like additional support for their mental health. While 40% reported that their overall wellness was negatively impacted by their seafaring career.

Seafarer Quotes from Survey’s Comment Section

Key aspects and important themes of these quotes were bolded for easy reference.

Question: What types of support are available to you that benefit your mental and/or physical health?

- “1. Talk with family, 2. **Meditation**, enjoy some movies, etc”
- **“Social activities on-board and parties on-board”**
- **“Motivation, connectivity with family, stress-free working environment.”**
- **“Interaction with colleagues.”**
- “Gym, movies, **get togethers, competitive games onboard”**
- “Onboard internet, regular chats with family. **Table tennis, treadmill, good colleagues. Family support.”**
- “My wife is one big support. I follow my instincts and **practice yoga and do indulge in some reliving fun activities.”**
- “Physical exercise and **for mental health patience and positivity”**
- “Very **first line of family onboard i.e., seafarers on board**, then the family ashore if have enough connectivity.”

Question: Any additional comments that you feel is important for us to know?

- "Life at sea has become more challenging and demanding!"
- "I like this survey and my kind advice is to make **stress management meeting** in weekly basis on every ship onboard"
- **"Seafarers need social support"**
- "Keep some **trainer onboard for physical training**"
- **"Anonymous access to contact mental health personnel onboard, create awareness among seafarers about mental health issues onboard"**
- "1. Recommending minimum hours of **exercises a day** for the inmates. 2. promoting some **guided recreational activities**. 3. offering weekly few hours for zoom call with the family at free of cost. 4. honouring timely discharge of contract"
- "It is **less stressful to sail with good people**, the days seem to pass better and faster. Been at sea for around 25 years, this is my understanding. Good people are rare to come by. **It shows when your seniors genuinely care about you and that greatly helps some people**. Have known a few people who were always stressed because they didn't want to get another shouting from their seniors, **this affected them and their mental state immensely**. Was in the same category during my cadetship days, took me years to overcome that. With the advent of MLC, now there is at least a system in place."
- "Like the survey, lot of question asked about mental illness so my opinion is that **in sea we are like family** if anyone feeling stressed, we always have there for him."
- **"Mental health is a serious issue for a seafarer and needs to be addressed. Counselling can be a remedy to address this issue."**
- "These kinds of surveys are good initiative. The **onboard staff should be imparted training regarding keeping up of physical and mental wellness**. The ashore staff should be made familiar with the turmoil of working conditions onboard and should be dedicated to **provide all kind of supports at best of their abilities**."
- **"Soft skills to be used by senior officers** rather being a one-sided conversation."
- "Introduce some **support for creative art**."
- **"Mental wellness training and exercises training should be given before joining"**
- **"Because of covid we are addressing to much about mental health, but before also that illness is there, it's good to find out solutions to overcome such health issues"**

Reported Resources for Support

Many participants reported that an important avenue of support was being connected and having regular communication with their family members. A majority also

reported that interacting with and having good relations with their fellow seafarers on board was particularly helpful. Multiple comments emphasised the importance of get-togethers, onboard parties, and team recreational activities to facilitate bonds between crew members and create a positive working environment.

In terms of activities to support mental and/or physical health, there were multiple responses related to yoga, regular exercise, meditation, competitive sports (i.e., table tennis), and other types of group board games.

Of note, there were only 12 out of the 351 responses (3.4%) reported being aware of and/or using mental health helplines. The International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) and Wellness at Sea helplines had one response each, while National Union of Seafarers of India (NUSI) had three. The remaining seven responses indicated that they had a company dedicated support lines.

Steps to Move Forward

As shown above, the final survey question asked seafarers if they had any additional comments and insights. Practical concerns were raised, such as requesting salary increase, long contracts (generally six months was recommended), limited shore leave, long work hours, demanding workloads, improved internet connectivity, etc...

Additionally, participants also kindly recommended a variety of methods and resources that could be implemented to better support seafarers on board. For instance, group yoga and/or exercise, providing mental and physical wellness training, leadership and anti-harassment training for senior staff, access to counselling, social activities, and guided recreational support.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

We received 351 responses over a one-month period. These responses from seafarers represented a heterogeneous sample in terms of variety of languages spoken, vessel types, age ranges, and number of months on board at time of survey taking.

However, most participants (80% of our sample) reported having more than 36 months of sailing experience, so we had limited responses from newly joined seafarers. Additionally, most participants in our seafarer sample (71%) reported that they were aware of and had a good understanding of mental health. Because our participant sample generally had more years of sailing, it is likely these experienced seafarers have developed their own coping mechanisms for living at sea which would in turn improve their overall wellness. Here, the years of experience was apparent in the survey's comments section through abundant knowledge and helpful recommendations regarding positive mental health and wellness.

Though seafarers represent a resilient population of individuals who can develop positive coping mechanisms in the adverse conditions of living at sea away from

loved ones, it is still important to offer them structured support. Our seafarer sample, with increased knowledge of mental health, still felt support is lacking. This demonstrates that they are not only aware of this subject, but also acknowledge that there is a genuine mental health concern for seafaring populations. For instance, approximately 73% know of at least one of their colleagues struggling with mental health issues while working at sea, while only 3% are aware of and/or used a support helpline.

Expecting seafarers to continue to use self-guided support is unsustainable long-term given the increased pressures and demands brought on by the current unprecedented Covid-19 climate. Providing helplines as support, such as NUSI or ISWAN, is a helpful resource but is often only used in crisis management situations (i.e., increased risk of suicide, severe depression). A preventative strategy that embeds mental health, wellness, and care into workflow will be a more effective method to create positive work environments and mitigate risk of mental illness.

Therefore, all seafarers deserve increased support not only through confidential helplines, but also through academically robust mental health trainings, counselling, and guided recreational activities to promote on board bonding. We propose one such wellness program incorporating these elements.

Proposal: The Transworld Wellness Program

This program is backed by evidence collected from surveying and speaking to seafarers. As most of our sample are experienced seafarers, we based our program on their immense shared knowledge and recommendations.

Our proposed program is a holistic top-down approach structured to guide seafarers to increase understanding of and develop tools to improve their overall mental health and wellness. Each element of the program is described below:

1. Basic Mental Health Training Modules
 - a. Demystifying Mental Health and Addressing its Myths
 - b. Spotting Signs of Common Mental Health Concerns
 - c. Workshops on Depression, Anxiety, Burn-out
 - d. Suicide Prevention & Safety Planning
 - e. What is Resilience and How is it Maintained?
 - f. Fatigue and Stress Management
 - g. Relaxation & Meditation

2. Empathic Leadership Training Modules
 - a. Psychological First Aid
 - b. What is Empathy and how does it help?
 - c. Active Listening
 - d. Effective Communication
 - e. Anti-Bullying & Impact of Harassment
 - f. Spotting Signs of Depression, Anxiety, Burn-Out

- g. Managing Mental Health Concerns on Board
- 3. Counselling services offered via multiple platforms (video, audio, text)
- 4. Regular surveys to assess mental state and check-in
- 5. Guided morning exercise regimes
- 6. Structured recreational and social activities
 - a. Provision of a tailored set of weekly activities

Final Notes

In summary, the focus of this programme is to improve the wellbeing of and establish a safe and positive working environment for our seafarers.

This report and subsequent program would not be possible without the help and support of all our seafarers who took the time to complete the survey and provide their perspective.

We would also like acknowledge Captain Savraj Mehta, Mr Ravi Nair, Captain Jaswant Singh, Captain Shiv Halbe, and Captain Rajiv Tatarbe for your exceptional support in circulating the survey and granting seafarers with an opportunity to have their voice heard.

Many thanks to you as well for taking the time to read this report. Please contact mithila.mahesh@transworldwellness.com if you wanted any further information regarding the Transworld Wellness Programme.