



# Seafarers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic

Birgit Pauksztat, Michelle Grech, Momoko Kitada and Rikke Bjerg Jensen

# Research questions

1. How is the pandemic affecting seafarers on international vessels?
2. What are the effects on mental health and exhaustion?
3. What factors mitigate the effects of the pandemic, i.e.: What kind of support is available - what kind of support is needed?

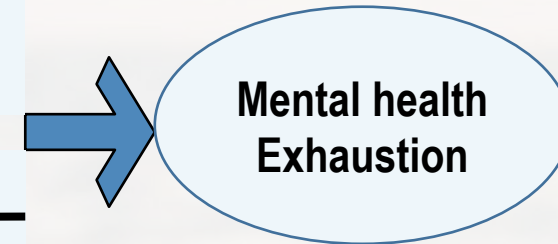
## *Key variables*

### **Perceived effects of the pandemic**

- Effects on work/life on board
- Effects on workload
- Perceived safety (at sea / in port)
- Main difficulties & challenges

### **Perceived support**

- Level of support
- Sources of support
- Support from company
- Communication with family/friends
- Social support on board
- Types of support needed



**Mental health  
Exhaustion**

# Data Collection



- Online survey, 3 July – 25 September 2020



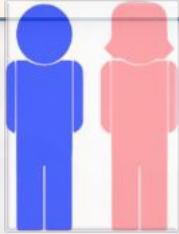
- Seafarers onboard international commercial vessels



- Promoted through social partners, MET institutions, and individuals & organizations in ports around the world



# Respondents and Vessel Characteristics



## 671 survey respondents

- 626 (93.3%) men
- 34 (5.1%) women
- On board 0-18 months (Mean = 4.0)



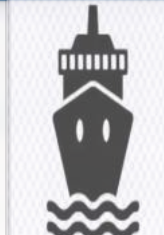
## Age & experience

- 19 to 65 years old (Mean=42.2)
- 0 to 47 years at sea (Mean = 17.7)



## Role

- 61.1% deck crew
- 27.8% engine crew
- 72.5 % officers



## Ship types

- 21.5 container ships
- 19.7 oil tankers
- 14.3 % bulk carriers



## Nationalities

- 32% Philippines
- 7.7% Sweden
- 7.3% Denmark, Germany
- 5.5% Ukraine

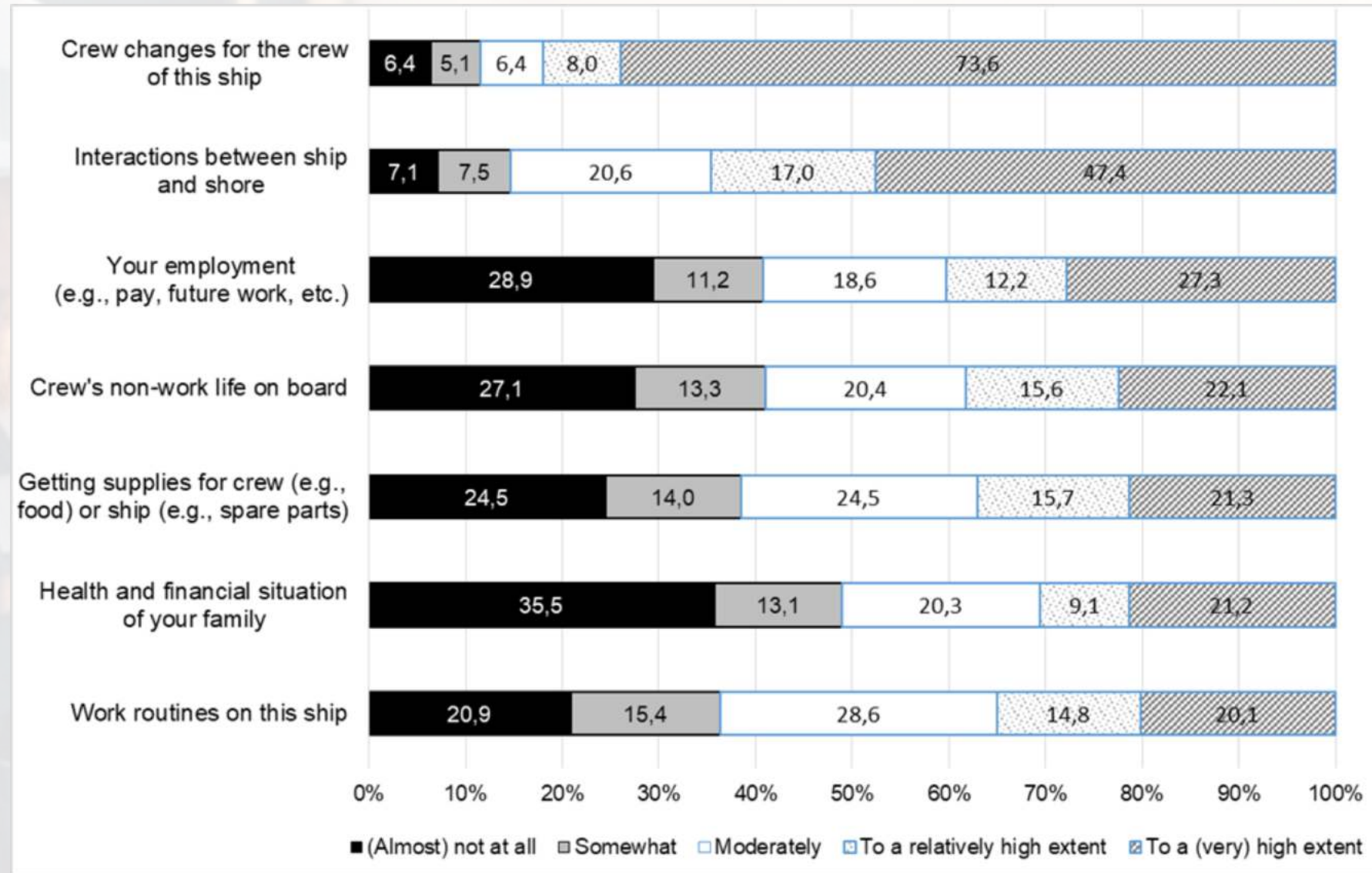


## Flag States

- 12.8 % Sweden
- 10.6 % Denmark
- 8.0 % Germany
- 5-7% Liberia, Malta, Singapore, Panama, Marshall I., Netherlands

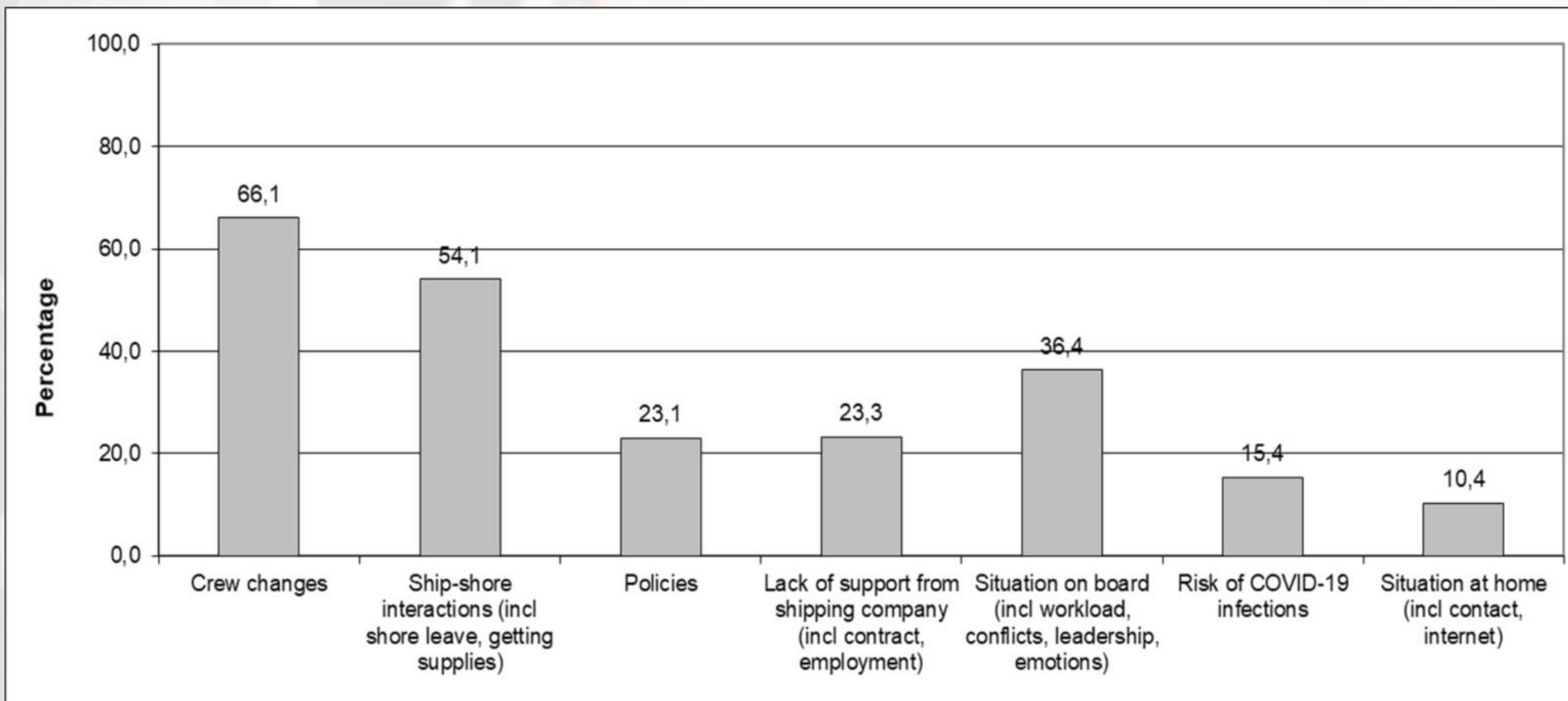
# Perceived effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

*Perceived effects of the pandemic*



# Perceived effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

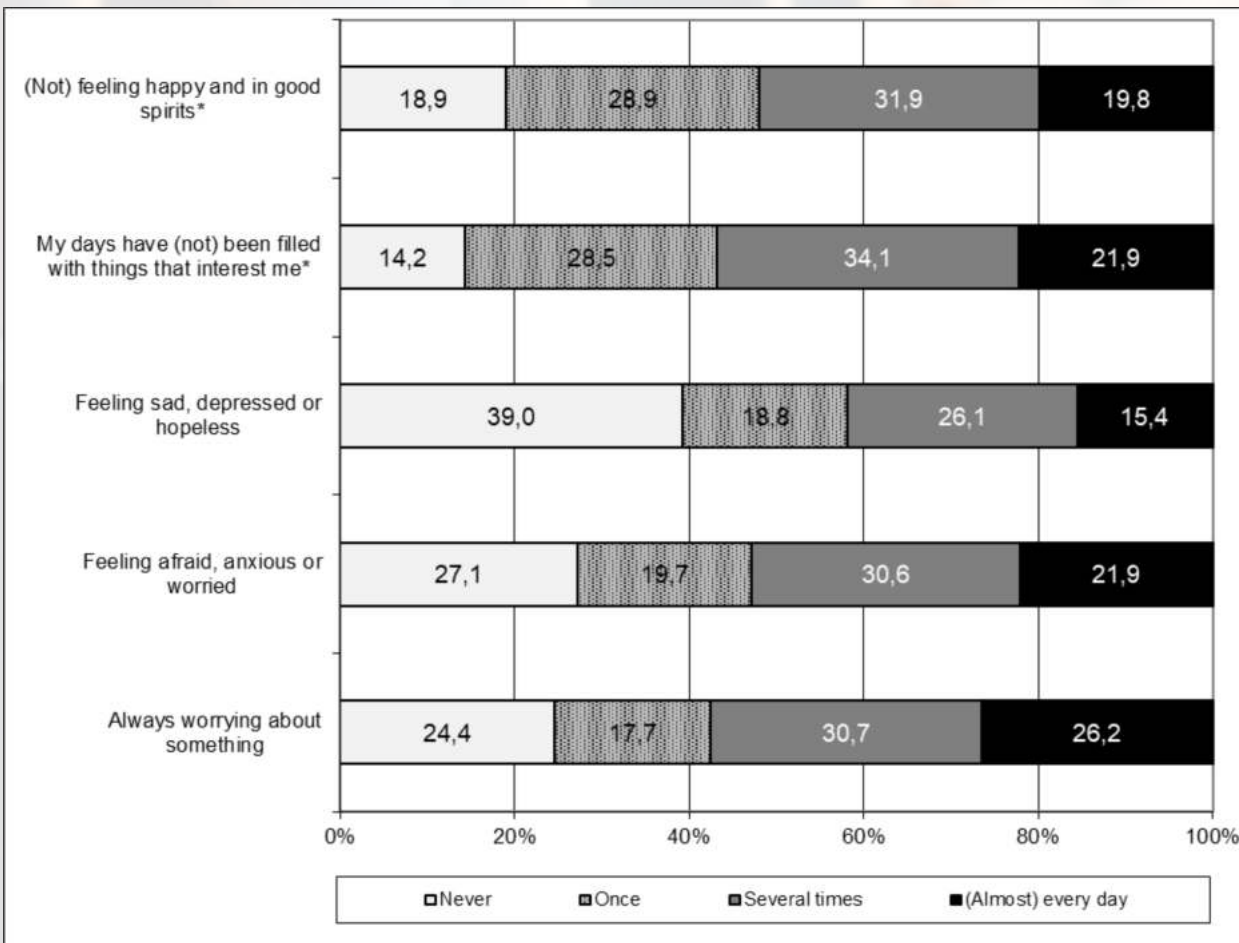
*Main difficulties and challenges during the last seven days*



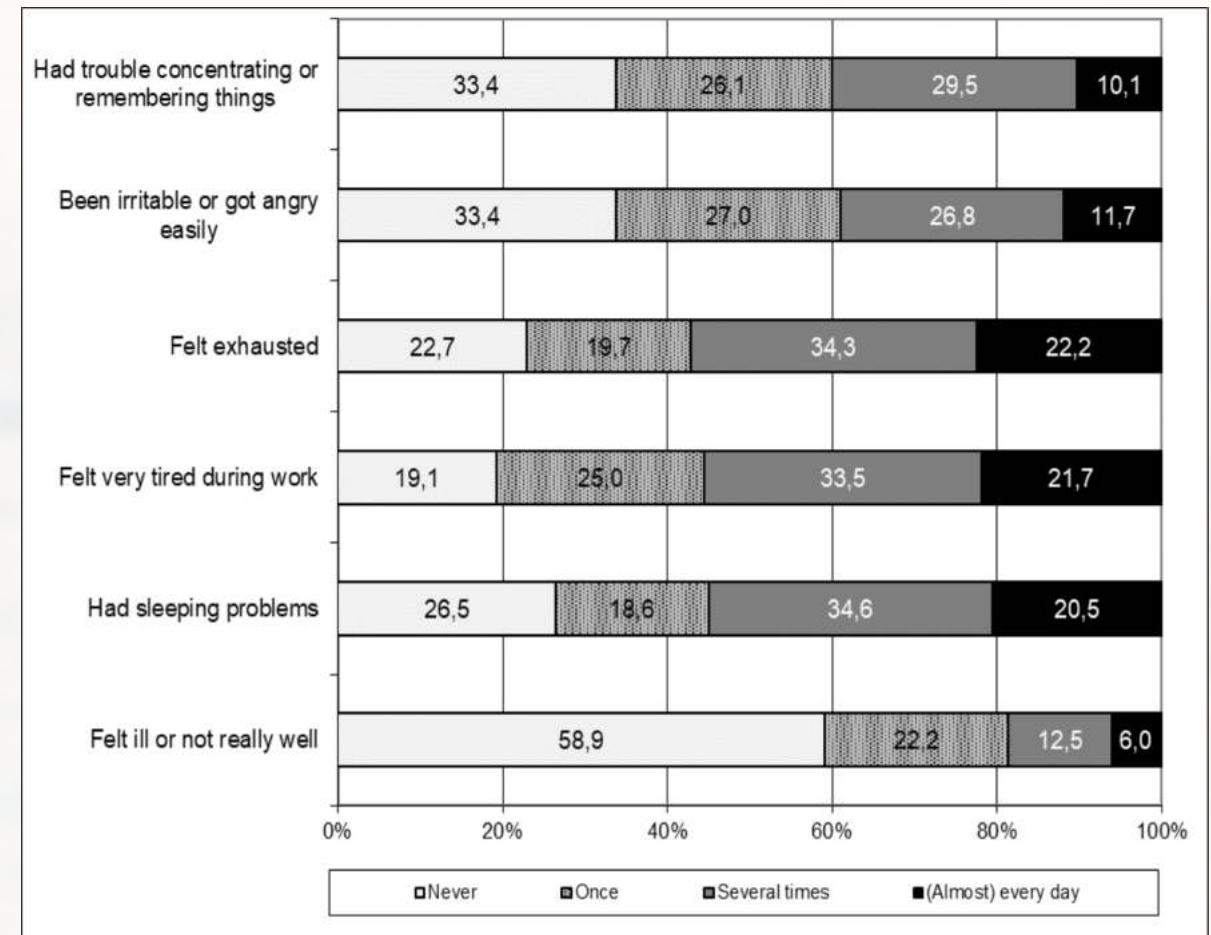


# Mental Health and Exhaustion

## Mental health

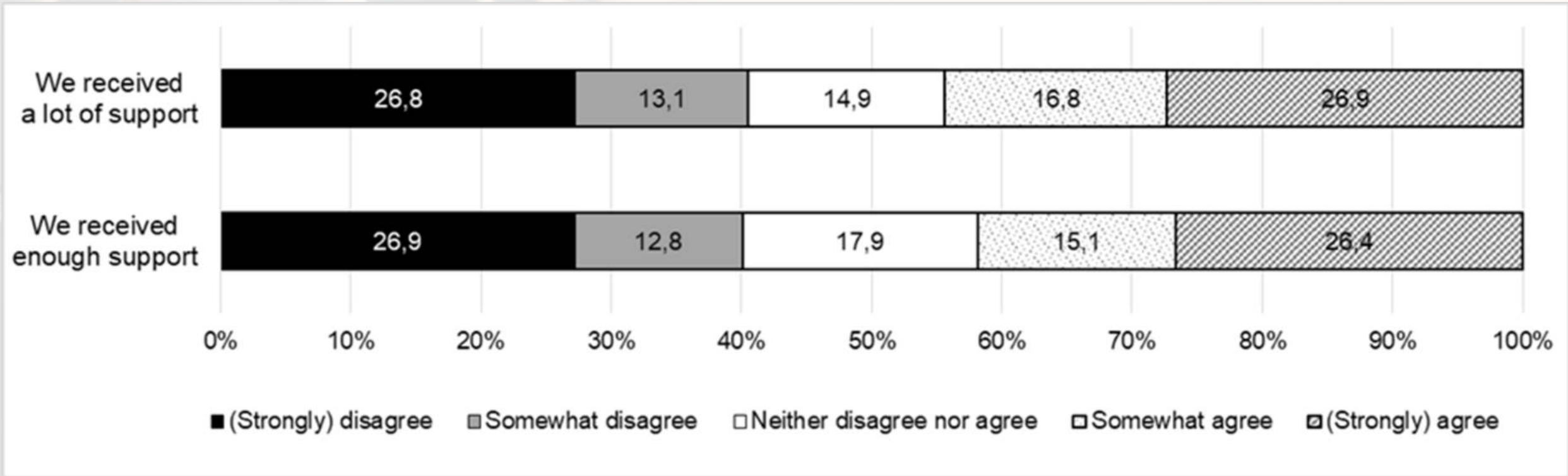


## Exhaustion



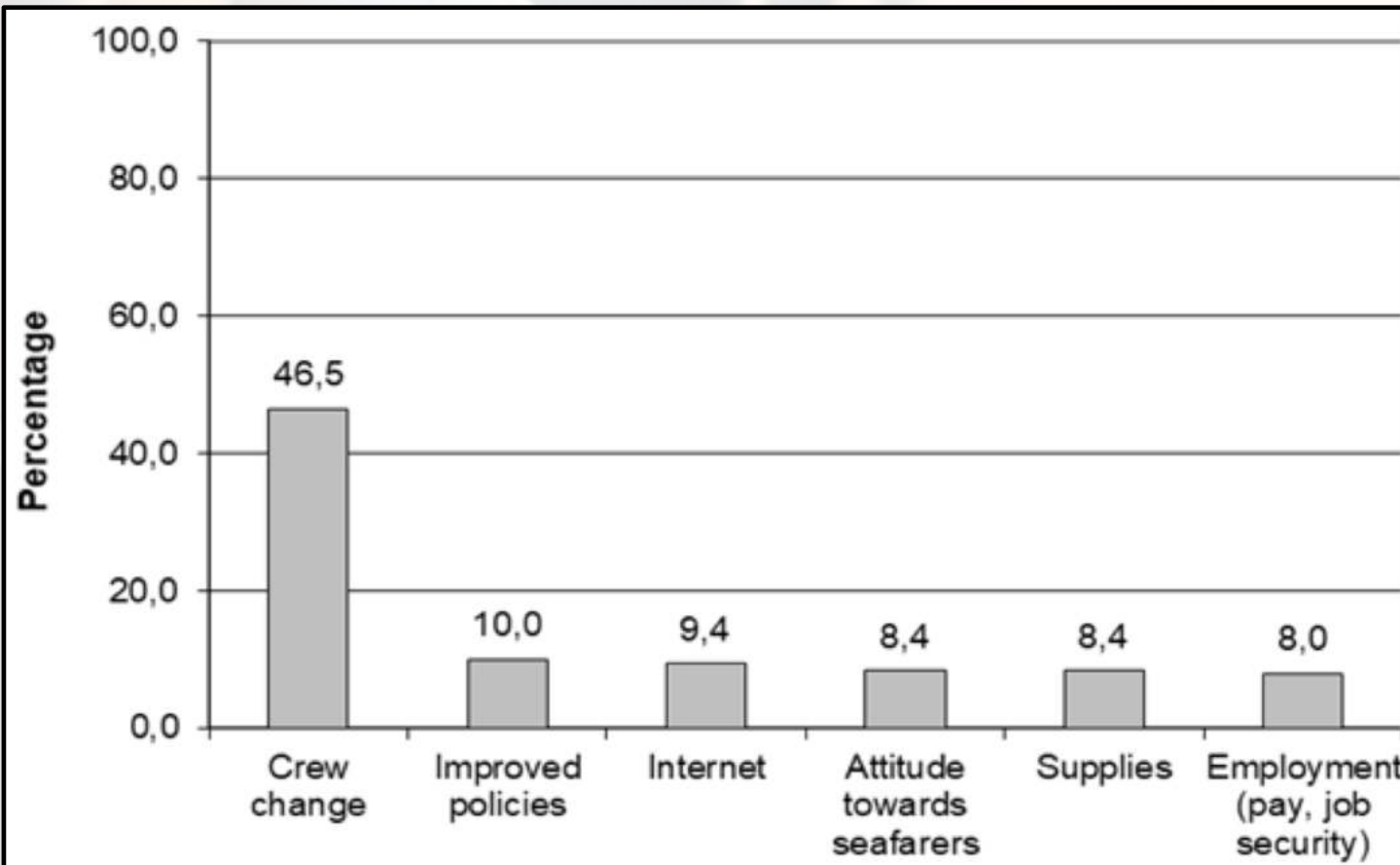
# Support

*Level of support received*





# Practical Implications - Type of Support Needed



- Organising crew changes
- Policies: establishing best practices, clear, simple and consistent rules
- Internet and communication
- Change of negative attitudes towards seafarers & recognition of seafarers' contributions
- Getting supplies, incl. PPE, medicine, personal supplies
- Shore leave for doctors' visits, purchasing personal items or recreation
- Pay and job security
- Support / information from the company
- Mental health support for crew members and family at home

# Thank you

We would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who helped with distributing the survey.

Most of all:

A special thanks to the seafarers who participated in the survey.

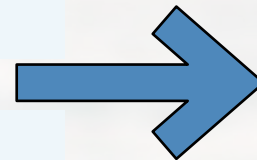
**Questions?**

Contact: Birgit Pauksztat, [birgit.pauksztat@fek.uu.se](mailto:birgit.pauksztat@fek.uu.se)

# Overview of key variables

## Perceived effects of the pandemic

- Effects on work/life on board
- Effects on workload
- Perceived safety (at sea / in port)
- Main difficulties & challenges



## Perceived support

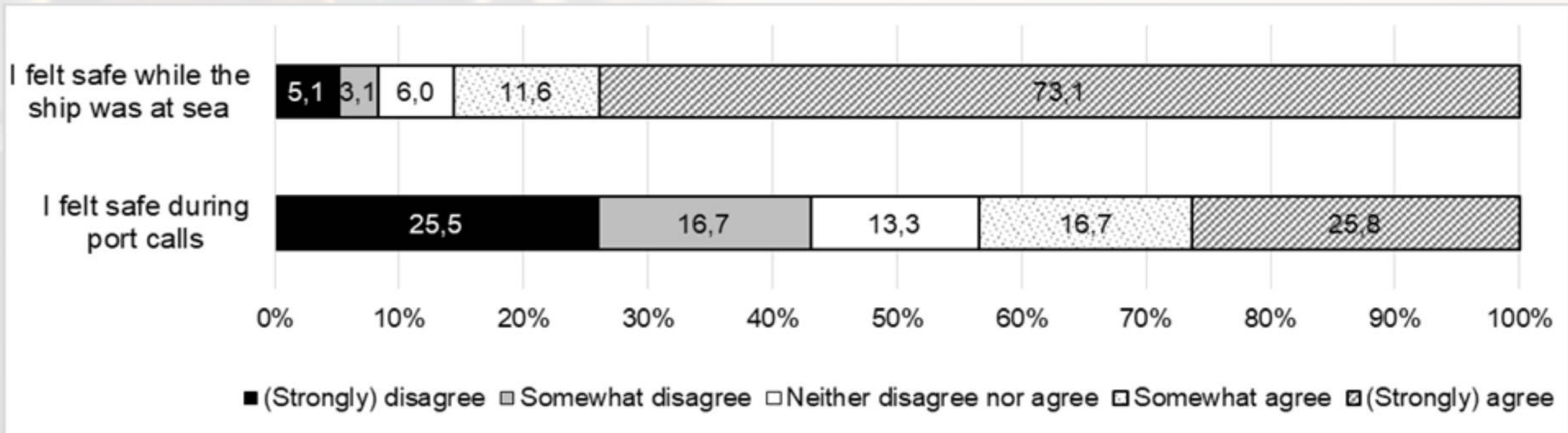
- Level of support
- Sources of support
- Support from company
- Communication with family/friends
- Social support on board
- Types of support needed

**Mental health  
Exhaustion**



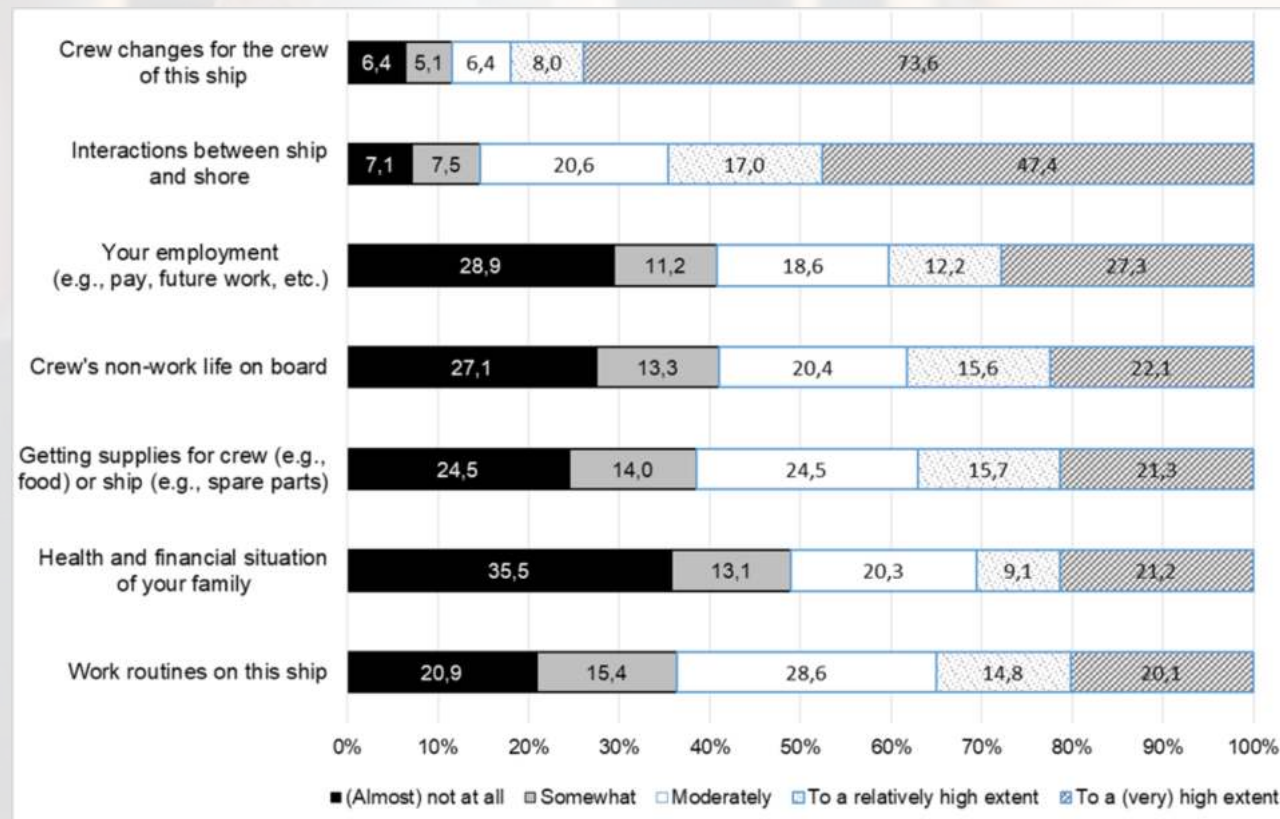
# Perceived effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

## *Perceived safety with regard to COVID-19*

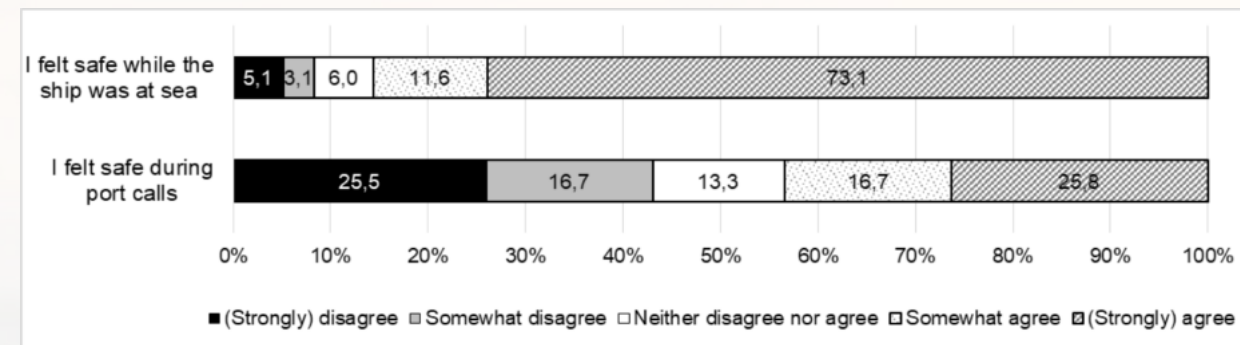


# Perceived effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

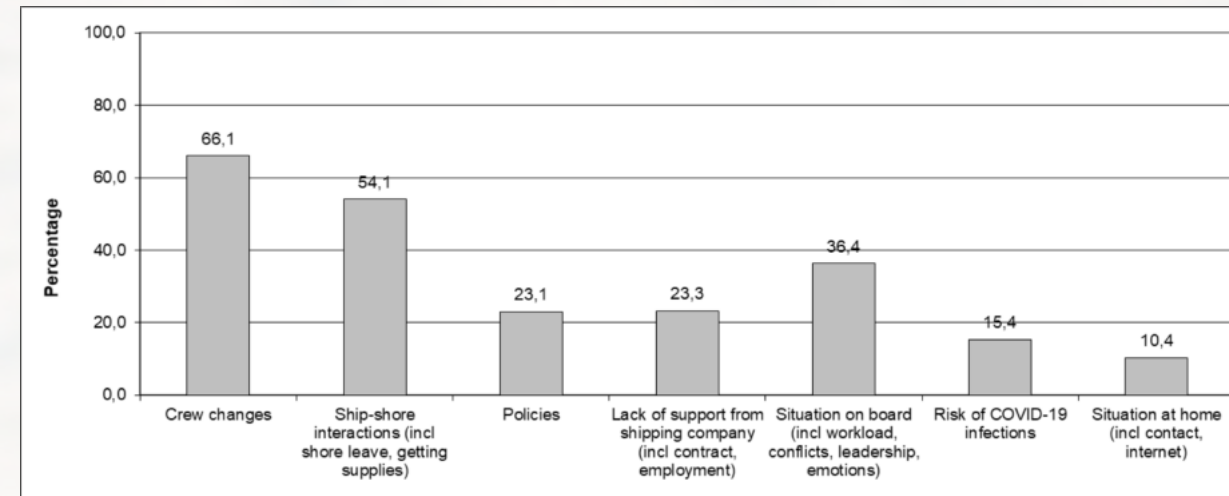
## Effects of the pandemic



## Perceived safety with regard to COVID-19

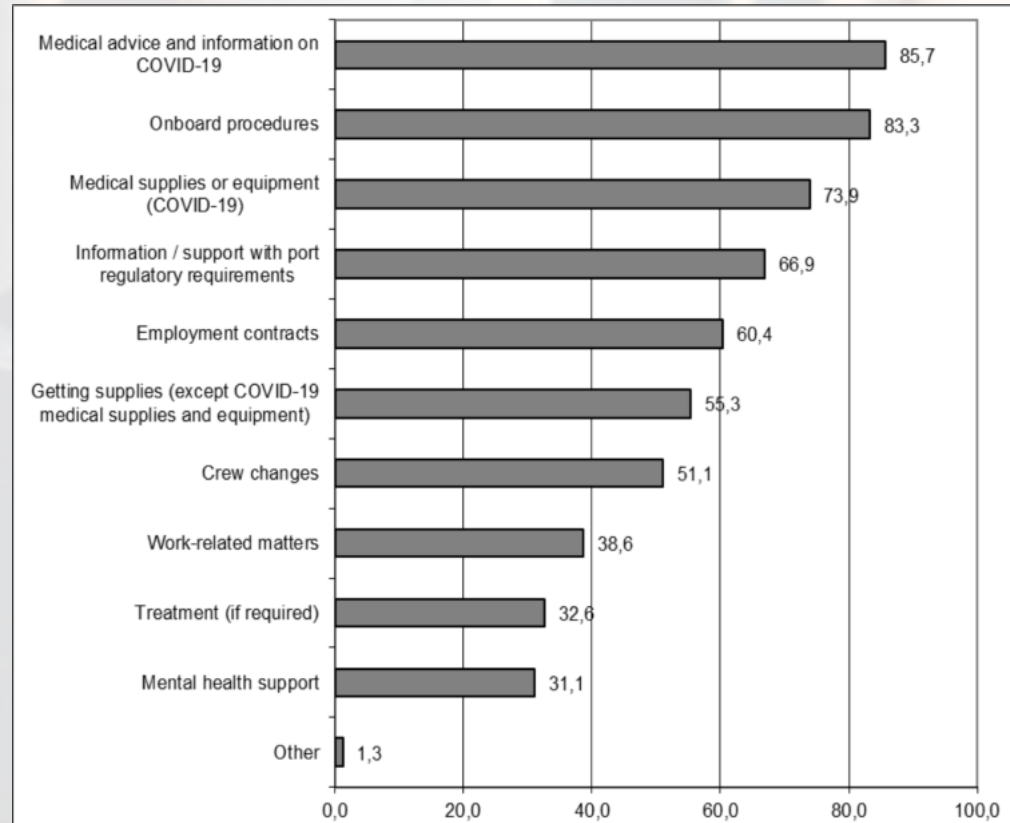


## Main difficulties and challenges

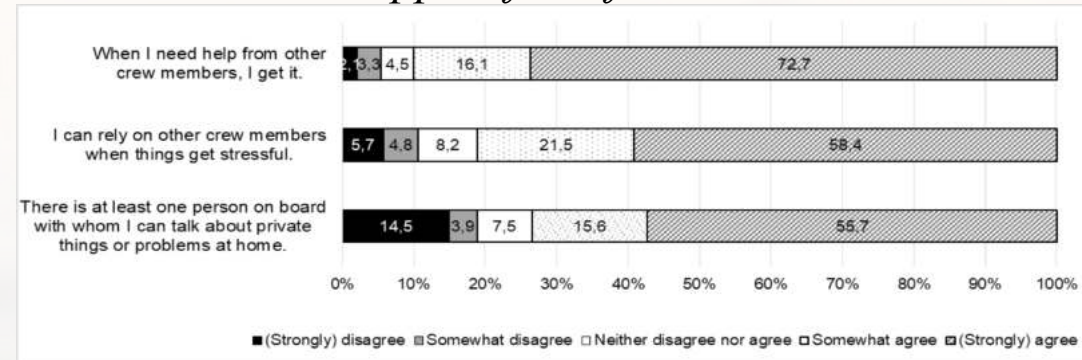


# Level, sources and types of support

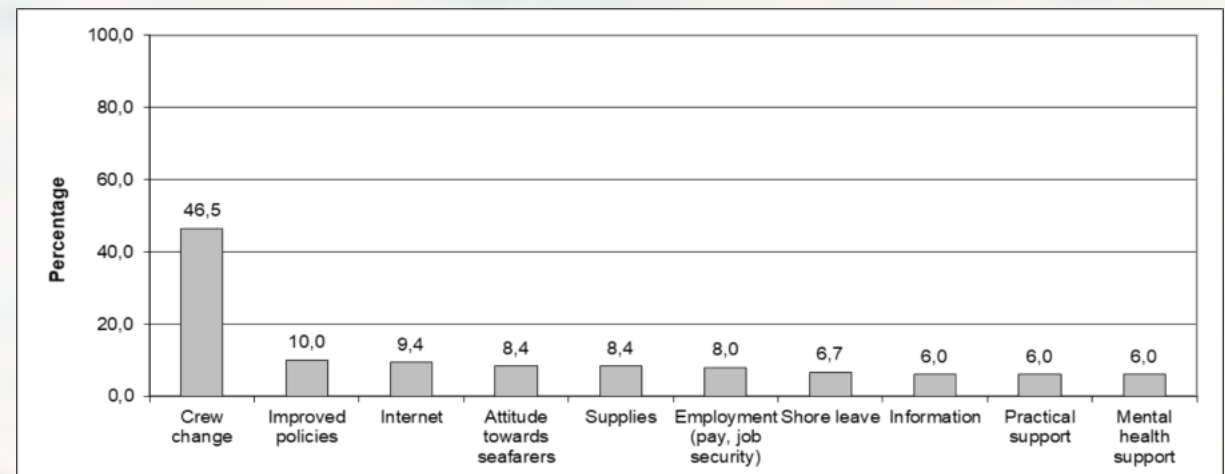
## *Support from the shipping company*



## *Perceived social support from fellow crew members*

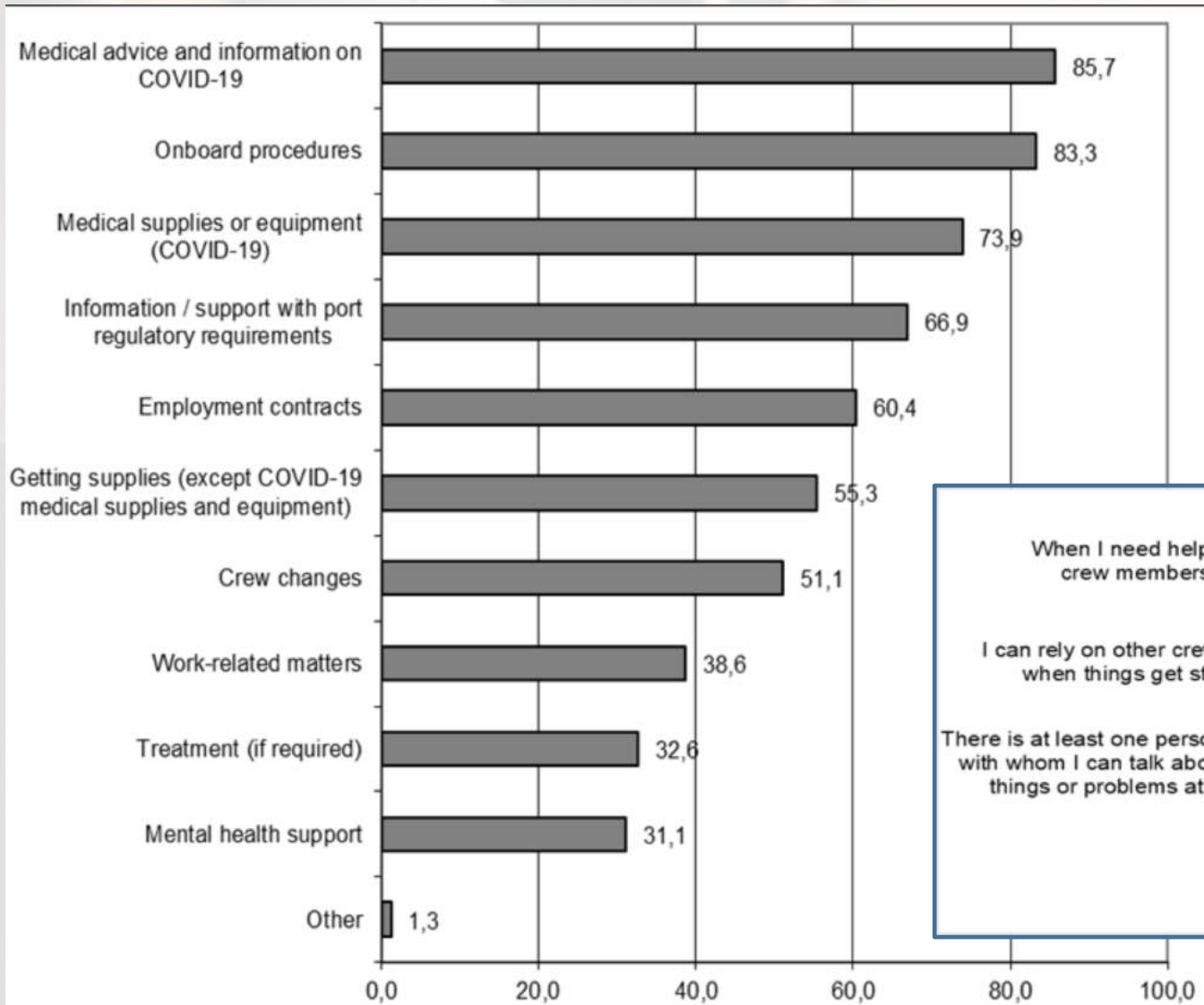


## *Perceived type of support needed*



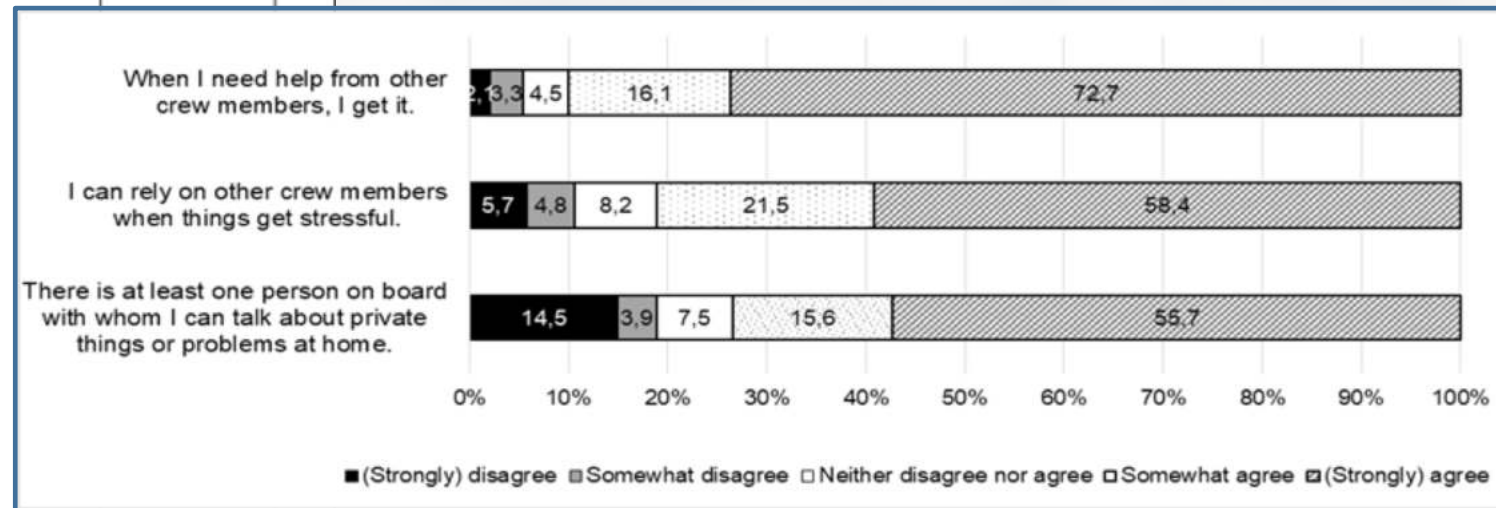


# Level, sources and types of support



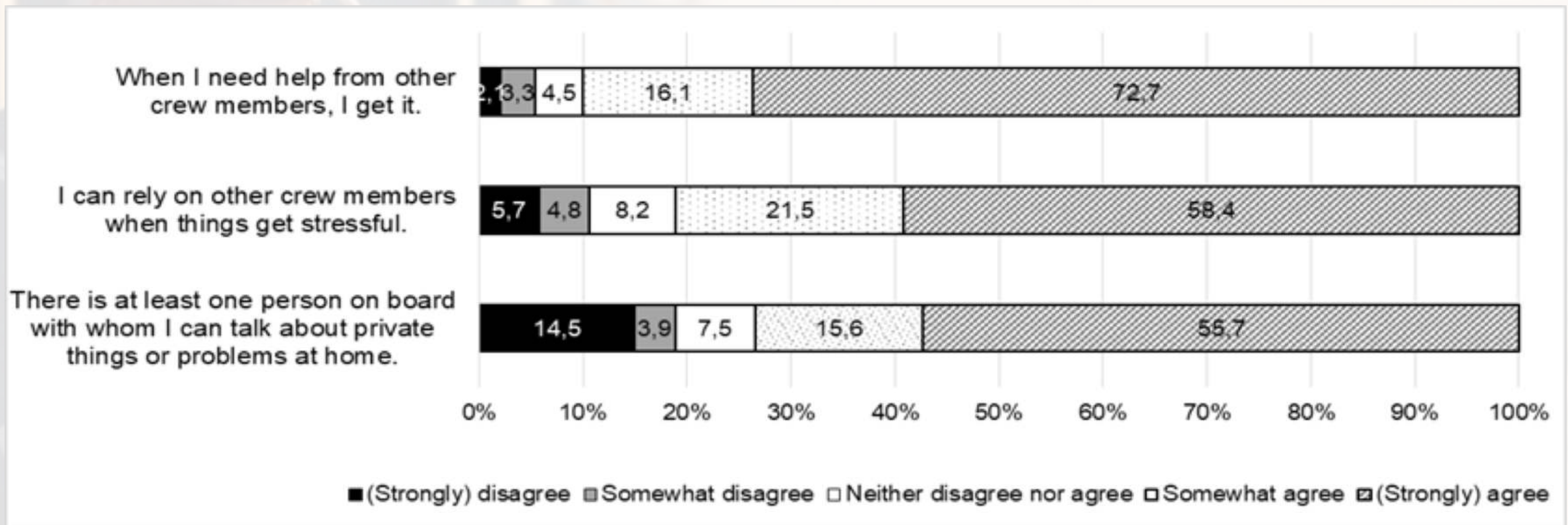
*Support from the shipping company*

*Social support from fellow crew members*



# Level, sources and types of support

## *Social support from fellow crew members*



# THE FORGOTTEN KEYWORKERS: CHALLENGES FACED BY BRITISH SEAFARERS AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

DR HELEN DEVEREUX AND DR EMMA WADSWORTH



# ABOUT THE PROJECT

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- Longitudinal study
- Preliminary findings from first questionnaire - July/August 2020
- Next questionnaire - early 2021
- 216 respondents completed the online questionnaire
- Participants were British seafarers of all ranks and employed across the various sectors of the industry
- Respondents recruited primarily via social media
- Supported by Merchant Navy Welfare Board and Nautilus International





# EMPLOYMENT TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Most (72%) described their contract as permanent, with 18% temporary/voyage, 6% unemployed and 4% giving other responses

How individuals were employed made a number of significant differences:

- More seafarers with permanent contracts had been joining the vessel as normal: 40% compared to 10% ( $p < 0.0001$ )
- Fewer seafarers with permanent contracts had not joined a ship as scheduled and were not being paid: 3% compared to 17% ( $p < 0.0001$ )
- Fewer seafarers with permanent contracts had been made redundant (or not had a contract renewed): 2% compared to 17% ( $p < 0.0001$ )

# EMPLOYMENT TERMS AND CONDITIONS

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- Fewer seafarers with permanent contracts reported an impact on their finances: 31% compared to 63% ( $p < 0.0001$ )
- Fewer seafarers with permanent contracts reported being more likely to leave the industry: 11% compared to 23% ( $p = 0.02$ )
- Fewer seafarers with permanent contracts reported being less likely to recommend seafaring: 29% compared with 47% ( $p = 0.01$ )
- Fewer seafarers with permanent contracts reported an impact on their career: 47% compared to 80% ( $p < 0.000$ )



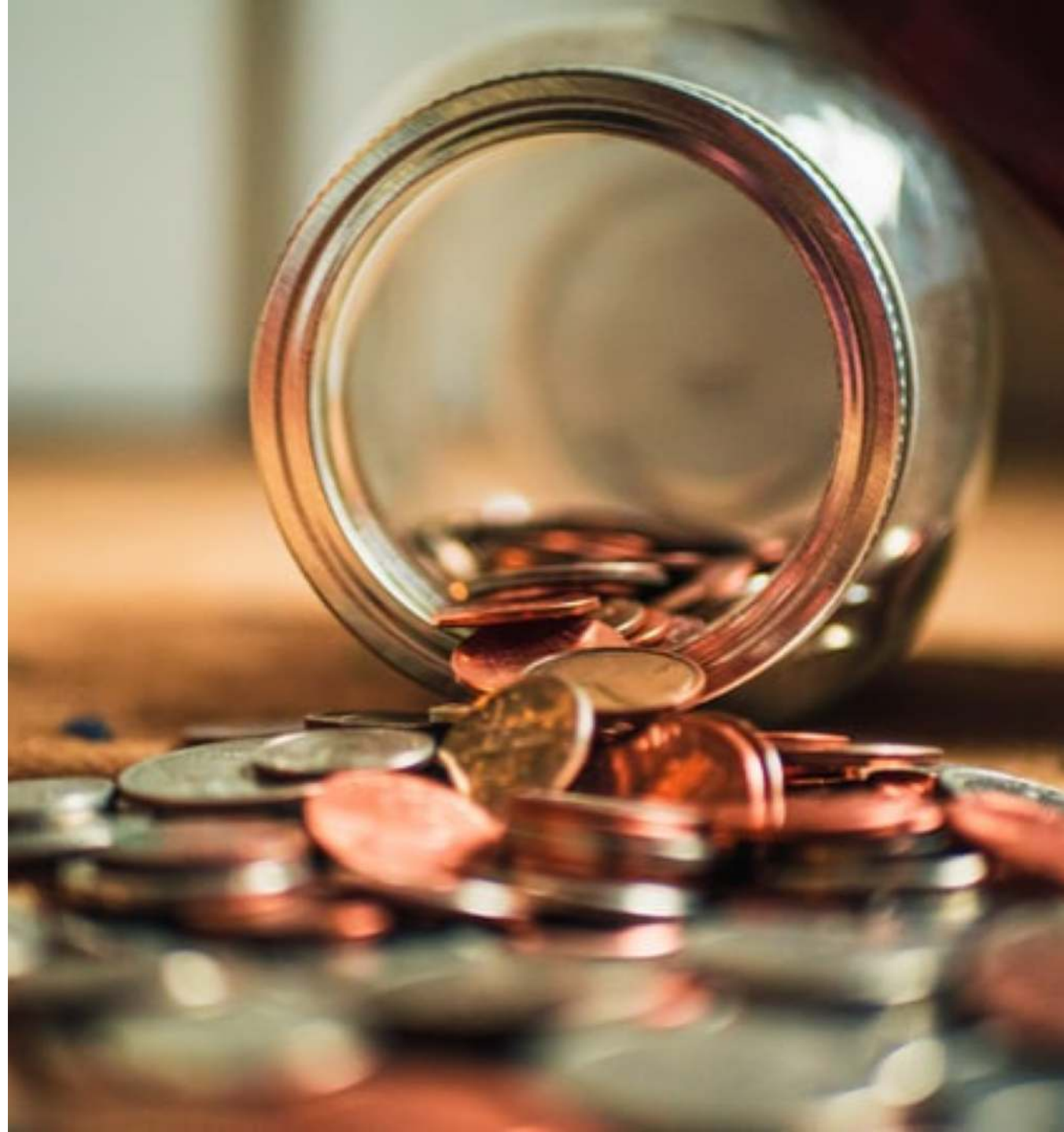


# FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

*“The furlough scheme to apply even during the months of leave. ( my yearly salary is paid in 8 month of contract not 12 calendar months) Having the 80% of the basic salary paid only during the months that I. Supposed to be in deployment does not help to pay the bills. I have lost two months of wages already.” Hotel Department, Cruise Ship*

*“I had a job offer withdrawn in April. I spent 3 months unemployed before being offered a temp contract with another company. But at approximately 50% of my previous salary.” Deck Officer, General Cargo*

*“I have now had to seek additional employment to cover costs whilst I wait to be offered a new contract at sea, whenever that may be.” Entertainment Department, Cruise Ship*





THANK YOU

# HOW DOES THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC REFLECT ON SEAFARERS' WELL-BEING?

WMU webinar: Understanding the Effects of COVID-19 on Seafarers



Dr. Ana Slišković, Associate Professor  
Department of Psychology  
University of Zadar, Croatia



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- The public health strategies for prevention of COVID-19 infection: **closing the national borders and cancelling international flights** → **prolonged stay on board and at home for seafarers.**
- Seafarers=**key workers** – *essential role in maintaining the flow of vital goods*
- Treatment (?)

**"A seafarer's life is  
a bread with seven crusts."**  
*(Croatian old saying)*

**SEAFARING = demanding, stressful and  
high-risk occupation**

*(series of scientific studies from "time before COVID-19").*



## STRESSORS IN SEAFARING

- Long-term separation from home and family (duration of onboard period, (non)respecting for work contract)
- Demands of the job: high workload, long working hours, shift work → fatigue
- Low autonomy in work
- Environmental stressors on board (*poor weather, ship motion, noise, vibration, heat*)
- Deprivation of physical and psycho-social needs on board (*sleep deprivation, limited influence on quality and quantity of food, limited opportunities for recreation, disturbed sexual life, limited internet access, social isolation*)
- “Living two separate lives”
- Precarious employment – job insecurity
- Role in the organization and role conflict
- Interpersonal relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates
- Level of support received from management and colleagues
- Multinational crews
- Introduction of changes and change management
- “Criminalization of seafarers”
- Exploitation and abuse



## OUTCOMES at individual and organisational level

- low **well-being**
- physical and mental health symptoms
  - disfunctional behaviour
- low performance (reduced quantity and quality of work)
  - safety & accidents
- increased absenteeism and job turnover
  - reduced job satisfaction and morale

### Performed study

#### ▪ RESEARCH QUESTION:

***How does the COVID-19 pandemic reflect on the well-being of seafarers on board and at home?***

#### ▪ METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH:

***Qualitative; personal experiences as the main data source.***



***“We now have one more crust named COVID19”. (quote by seafarer from Croatia)***

**SAMPLE:** 752 seafarers from the international seafarers' population  
(40% on board, 60% at home)

- **gender:** 89.2% male, 10.8% female
- **age:** from 19 to 76 years ( $M=37.3$ ,  $SD=10.4$ );
- **length of service in the shipping sector** 14.1 years ( $SD=10.1$ )
- **international shipping** 90.4% vs. **national shipping** 9.6%
- **type of ship:** cargo (66.9%); passenger (16.1%); special-purpose (17.0%)
- **ranks:** deck officers (39.9%), masters/captains (16.5%), engine officers (10.4%), chief engineers (7.9%), electro-technical officers (5.6%), cadets in the Deck and Engine department (6.4%), members of the deck crew (5.2%), members of the engine crew (2%), members of the Steward Department (1.7%) and others.
- **countries of residence:** Croatia (27.5%), Turkey (8.78%), the Philippines (7.7%), Ukraine (5.6%), Romania (5.1%), the United Kingdom (4.5%), India (4.1%), Latvia (3.4%), Russia (3.5%), the Republic of Ireland (3.3%), Germany (2.5%), the Netherlands (2.7%), the United States of America (2.1%), Montenegro (1.8%), Sweden (1.7%), Oman (1.6%), Bulgaria (1.2%). Countries with less than 1% of participants: Malaysia, Norway, Greece, Lithuania, Italy, Egypt, Brazil, Belgium, South Africa, Poland, Indonesia, Algeria, Georgia, Spain, Bangladesh, Finland, Nigeria, France, Venezuela, Malta, Nepal, Serbia, Slovenia, Ghana, Canada, Pakistan, Australia, Lebanon, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Colombia, Morocco, Senegal, Chile, the Seychelles, Luxembourg, Syria, New Zealand, Tanzania and Portugal.
- **contracted patterns of on-board and off-board shift change:** from shorter equal periods of less than one month (e.g. 15 days on-off), through medium equal periods (e.g. 3 months on-off) and medium non-equal periods (e.g. 4 months on, 2 months off), to longer periods with equal duration (e.g. 6 months on-off) and non-equal (e.g. 8 months on followed by 2 or 4 months off).
- **marital status:** married (59.4%), single status (23.5%), and living in domestic partnership (13.3%), divorced (2.4%), separated (0.9%) and widowed (0.4%); **having children:** 60% of participants

## DATA COLLECTION\*:

on-line  
5th of April - 14th of May 2020

open-ended question:  
*"How does the COVID 19  
pandemic affect you personally?"*

## DATA ANALYSIS: thematic analysis (TA)

## RESULTS:

- extensions to stay on board / at home
- range of different experiences
- majority of the participants: some negative experiences
- **TA: mental, physical, social and economic well-being**

*\* THANK TO ALL ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS  
WHO SHARED THE CALL FOR STUDY I*



...I finished 4 month on board and no any hope of near future sign off. It is a very stressful situation affecting my physical and mental condition. I feel that I am **abandoned by society**, that I am good only like a **slave** but **not as a part of human community**...

**Not knowing when** I will go has increased my **anxiety** level, causing me **medical issues**.

...desire to escape, **hatred for all international organizations designed to protect the rights of sailors**... aversion and complete unwillingness to return to work at sea, **suicidal thoughts**.

I want to go home, my contract already finished, and I am tired physically and mentally! And **no information up on now about crew change**, and how long we will stay on board more, 1, 2, 3 months! And every next day emotional state become worst!

They **forgot** us!

We are already **tired** and our **body and mind** has reached its **limits** ...

... I will survive, but it will leave consequences. **Working hard every day**, keeping watch in CCR and Bridge as well. No day off since beginning of December. **I'm fed up and just want to reach home**.

Feel like in **jail**!

...Ratings are so far not scheduled for Crew change, which is very hard for them. Some will reach **1 year onboard** in May...

**Completely exhausted**. No wish to work. Feeling of **indifference about my duties and responsibilities**. Feeling indifference about the ship. Feeling loss of controlling your life. Feeling sadness.

...Loss of motivation, loss of work productivity. Constantly **depressed**. Very bad emotional state. Can't sleep. **Horrible state of mind during navigation watch and cargo operations, loss of concentration as a result**.

**seafarers on board**

My **financial situation** with every day coming worst and worst. I have credit and my documents expired in end of November. If pandemic not finished **I will lost my documents and my position**. Without my job, I can't renew my documents.

**Uncertainties  
for the future in  
all aspects.**

Horrible / I'm isolated with family at home, exceed vacation with no payments/incomes.  
**Afraid about future...**

**No  
income.**

I don't know  
**how to feed  
my family.**

I feel **frustrated**, and already feeling **depressed** because my affected financial status... I'm sole provider and being without any means to provide for family at this time leaves **helpless** and then frustrated, **angry**, **anxious** combined with only negative feelings rather than positive since I'm home with my loved ones.

... Situation is very stressful as before you were in **isolation on board and now you need to do isolation at home and again afterwards go on board for basically another isolation...** Social life will be poor for whole year as you are in isolation. Hope this will end soon at least for us seafarers because traveling is our life.

**Lost the job.**

## CONCLUSION



- **Seafarers on board:** threatened *social, mental & physical well-being* → repercussions for *health, work efficiency, and on-board safety*.
- **Seafarers at home:** threatened *economic well-being* → reflecting on *general well-being, health, and motivation to work in maritime sector*.
- Seafarers' descriptions of *reality as far away from the concept of 'key' workers*.

### What has changed since spring? 9 months of pandemic

- International Maritime Organisation (IMO) & other maritime and transport organizations and unions (ILO, ISC, ITF...): calls to Governments for **enable crew changes** (designation as key workers which would exempt them from travel restrictions; development of protocols for safe crew change during the pandemic).
- Estimated figure (ITF, IMO, ICS): 400,000 seafarers are stuck at sea, months beyond their contracted time; in some cases more than a year.



*Thank you for attention.*



# Maritime Welfare Survey

**Joanne Stokes**

**Senior Principal Human Factors  
Consultant**

25 November 2020



# THE SURVEY

## Particulars

Respondents: seafarers and office personnel

3 dimensions:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Organisational Support
- Disease Management and Treatment

## Partnership

Lloyd's Register



UK Chamber of Shipping



Mission to Seafarers  
Safety at Sea





# SURVEY AIMS

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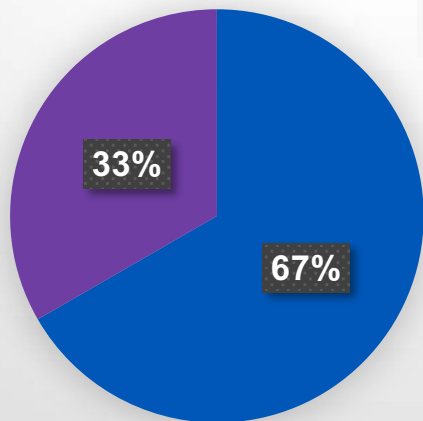
The aim of this survey is to understand:

- How COVID-19 has affected seafarers' and land-based workers' mental and physical health
- How the maritime workforce has been supported during this challenging period and gather insights about the level of care and welfare given by marine employers
- What's gone right and what may have gone wrong so we can share these lessons with the entire industry

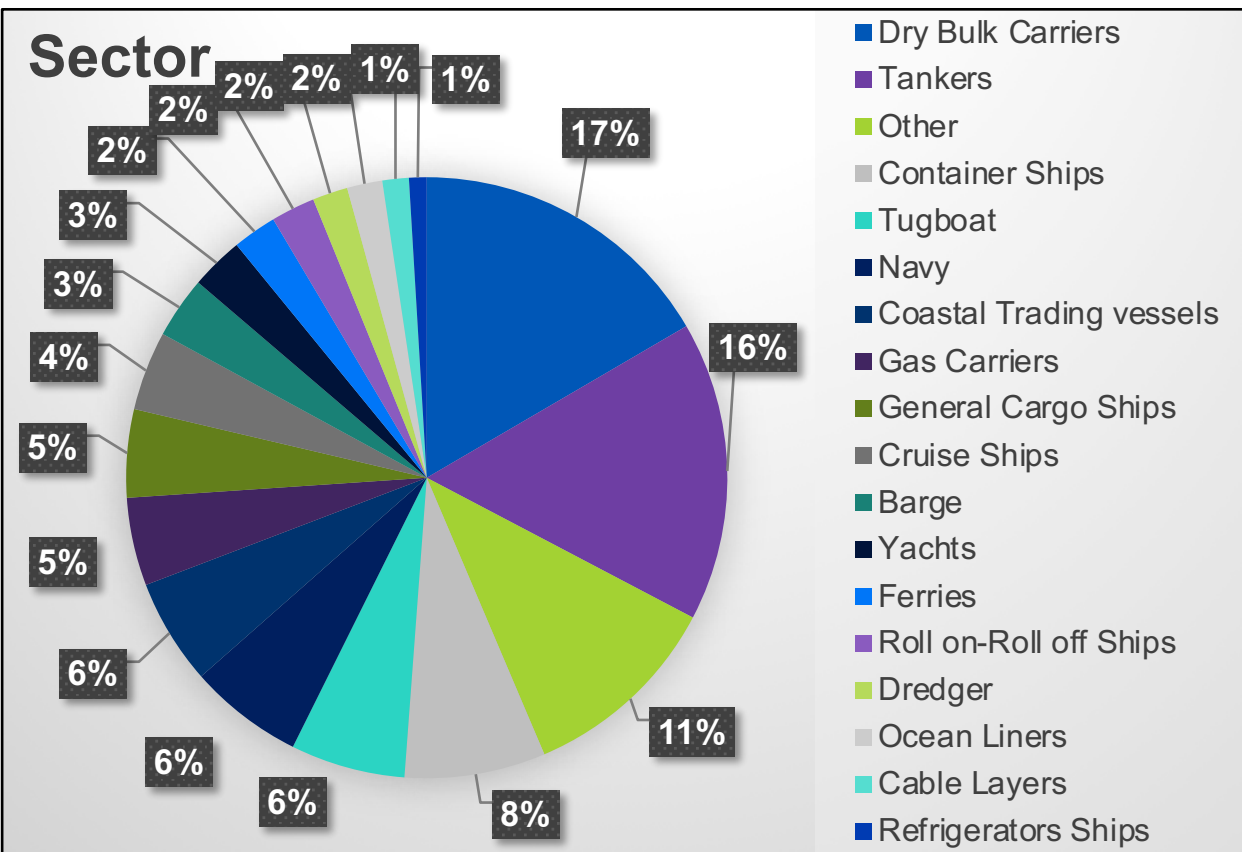
# DEMOGRAPHICS

## Respondents

- Land-based Staff
- Ship Staff



## Sector



Survey open between June 25<sup>th</sup> – End September 2020

# RESULTS

This presentation focuses predominantly on the Seafarers' results.

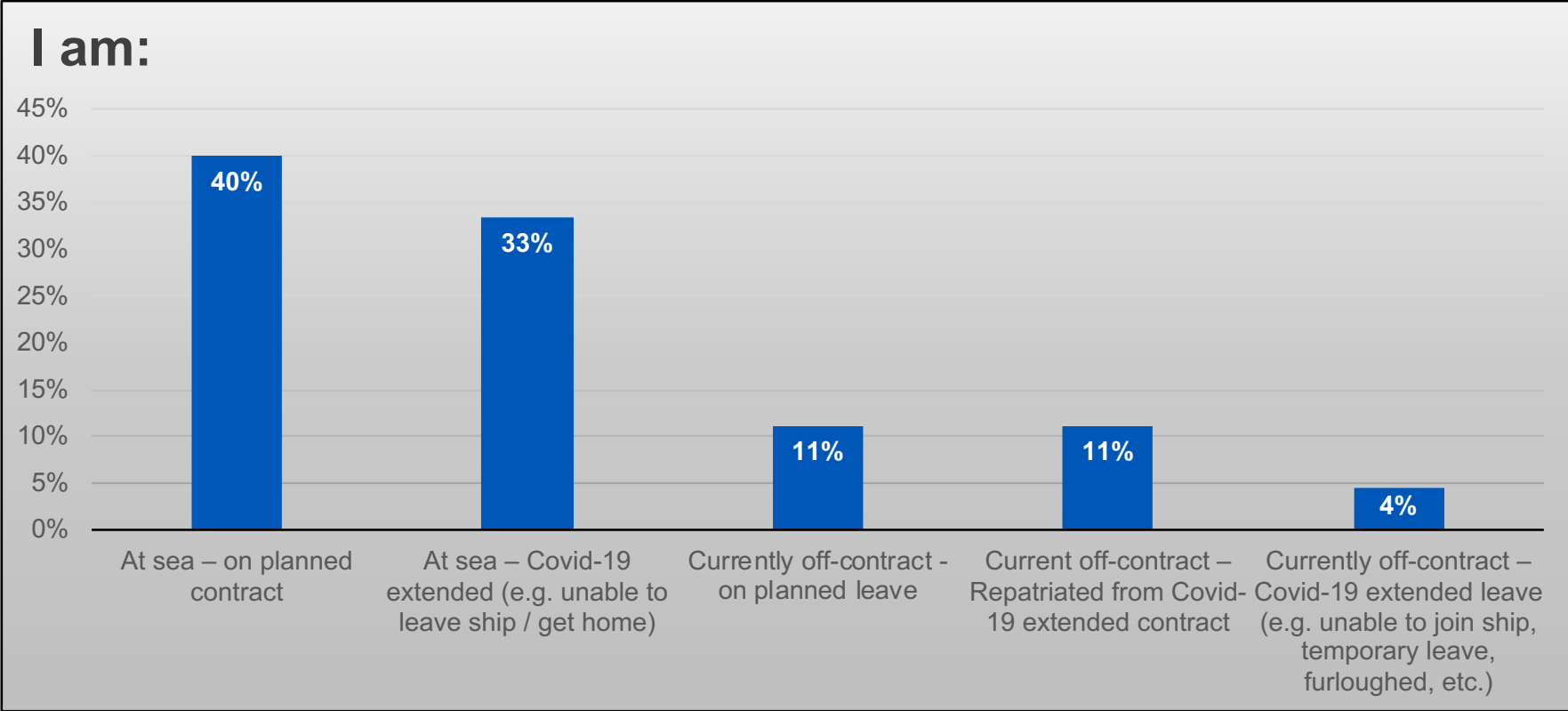
When asked about the effect the pandemic is having on them, Seafarers were less positive overall than land-based workers





# CREW CHANGE REFORM, VALUE AND RECOGNITION

Ship Staff



75 days on average

127 days on average 150 days on average

# CREW CHANGE REFORM

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## Comments

- *“[Country] treat ship's crew like a plague carriers. \*\*\*\* published notice they will detain ship if crewmember more than 14 month on board, but they did nothing to provide crew changes”.*
- *I believe... “My company is using this as an opportunity to extend rotations despite crew changes being allowed in [country] with plenty of outgoing international flights available. It has become an acceptable excuse to save money and exploit seafarers. Those who don't accept are threatened with losing their jobs”.*
- *“Shipping industry is strong enough to speak with governments & IMO and ask for urgent crew changes authorization”*

# VALUE AND RECOGNITION

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## Seafarers as Essential Workers

Despite many IMO representatives and countries designating seafarers as essential workers:

- Only 8% of seafarers strongly agreed that they feel valued in their role at this time, with
- Only 13% strongly agreeing that they are performing an essential role during the pandemic



# VALUE AND RECOGNITION

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## Comments

- *“We work for each and every one of you to have food, water, fuel, cars etc. We need support in this tough times, but we were forgotten and abandoned by everybody.”*
- *“Feel abandoned by countries that benefit from our trade. Feel abandoned by own government who provide no assistance to seafarers and their families. Feel disposable.”*
- *“They have invested little to no effort in addressing quality of life or pay issues for mariners stranded at sea.”*

# CREW CHANGE REFORM, VALUE AND RECOGNITION

The message is very clear

Crew change reform is urgently needed

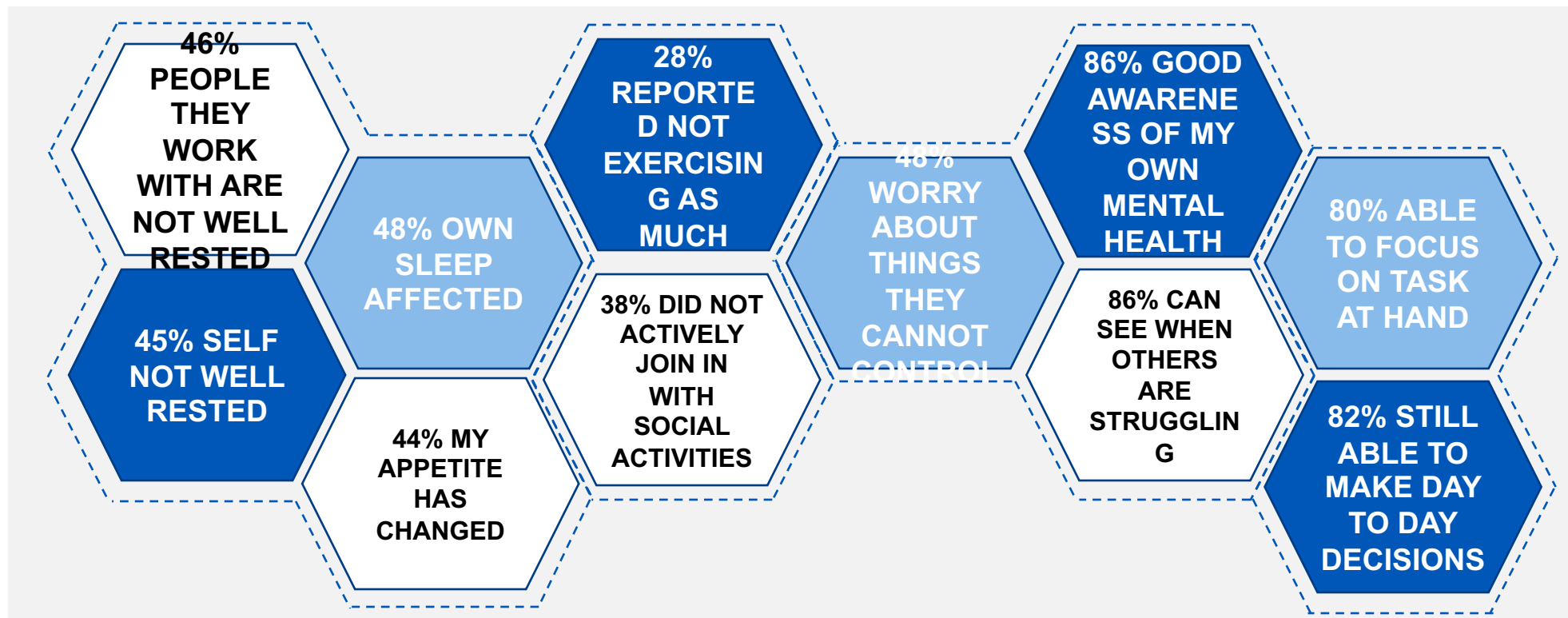
- Now we have IMO recommended protocols for crew changeovers ([here](#))
- Does not include any recommendations to support health and wellbeing
- Results show us that these are not applied at all levels: by all countries, ports, airlines, organizations, etc.

Seafarers need to be consistently recognized **AND treated** as essential workers

- Many countries now signed up to Seafarers as [Essential Workers](#) BUT 400,000 are still stranded at sea
- Seafarers need to experience first-hand that they are valued by their fellow man, countries, and their own organization

# MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Since the pandemic seafarers...







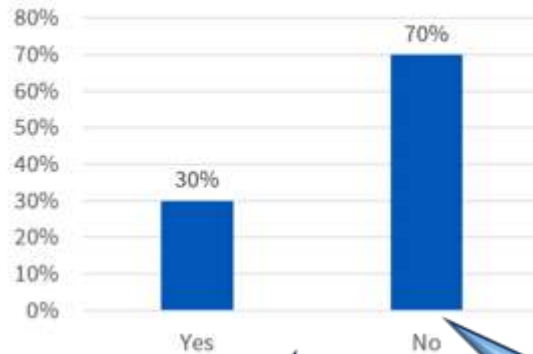
# ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

## Organisational support to seafarers during pandemic

Rate  
effectiveness  
of company  
support (1-  
10, where 10  
is excellent)  
n= 6.29

50% access to  
professional  
support

24. Have you used the professional  
support services provided?



**What is the reason that you have not used these professional support services?**

- **Stigmatisation of mental health** (career related worries – fear of negative impacts on employment)
- No need
- Not effective
- Support from family

75% not  
receiving  
welfare  
checks

54% not actively  
helped to  
manage stress  
& fatigue

45% company  
no take extra  
steps to manage  
my health and  
wellbeing

60% no access  
to financial  
advice

# SOCIAL DOWNTIME

During the pandemic ...

27% internet connectivity does not allow to talk to family and friends

65% have good access to gym equipment (but 28% don't exercise as much)

22% company does not provide me with ability to frequently contact family & friends

## Comments

- *“Senior management are committed to getting us sailing again but are afraid to allow recreational activities onboard. We must socially distance even though everyone is tested and was quarantined for 15 days onboard before being released for duty”.*
- *“Access to decent internet and phone would significantly relieve the stress and fatigue that seafarers are now burdened with. However the company has in fact lowered the bandwidth available and not all crew have access to computers. WIFI **must be made available for all.**”*

# MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING

## Message is clear

### **i. Promote positive mental health; ii. Remove the stigma; and iii. Provide the tools, by:**

- Providing access to health and wellbeing professional support to all seafarers
- Better utilizing existing mental health resources (e.g. WHO materials, UK Chamber of Shipping - [Mental Health Awareness and Wellbeing Training Standard](#), [MCA Wellbeing at sea guides](#), etc.)
- Provide better onboard training on signs of fatigue, mental and physical health in self and others – and encourage open discussions
- Engaging organizations' senior management in promoting mental health and wellbeing
- Following this up by enacting this support at the operational level – gaining trust
- Provide better social downtime support to all seafarers:
  - Higher bandwidth, more data allowances, more frequent contact with loved ones
  - Encourage social downtime activities – preferably in Mess or Day room



# OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

## Operational support to seafarers during pandemic

Rate  
effectiveness  
of company  
support (1-  
10, where 10  
is excellent)  
**n= 6.29**

48% not able to  
fully agree  
they'd been  
provided with  
COVID-19 PPE

68% agree  
company is doing  
everything to  
provide essential  
supplies to  
vessels

39% believe  
workload  
has  
**INCREASED**

66% felt H&S not  
balance  
appropriately with  
operational  
demands

42% company  
does not  
communicate  
logic behind  
decisions made

# OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

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## Comments

- ✓ *“One good thing about COVID - no visitors on board. Paperwork via e-mail. All the day someone require attention, escort, time and some copy of some certificate. Or signature. Or both. Now it's much easier.”*
- ✗ *“They have done a VERY poor job keeping in communication with the workforce, whether those stuck ashore waiting to go back to work, or those stuck afloat waiting for relief.”*
- ✗ *[There is...] “no fixed schedule of updates. It started well and dropped quickly. Crew were not involved on status of work done or efforts taken aiming to arrange crew changes. Too little feedback given to crew on entire situation/ problems.”*
- ✗ *“I myself tested positive for COVID-19. Out of a crew of 95 almost 1/3 of the crew tested positive. Many of those of certain nationalities where then fired after recovering.”*

Seafarer in quarantine after disembarking:
- ✗ *“There was no support from XXX. Not one email asking how I was etc. I was left in a Brazilian hotel room for 3 weeks. Not allowed out of the room and given 3 meals a day with very little choice. I had no access to WIFI, tv or phone services.”*

# OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

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## The message is clear

- Companies to provide more informative communications
  - Continue to provide timely and informative communications
  - Communicate the underlying logic behind COVID-19-related decisions
    - help seafarers understand *why*
- Companies to understand the pressures, fatigue levels and workload associated with current situation – and make allowances; maintain a safe operation.
- Companies to support seafarers home to home – disembarkation should not mean company becomes disengaged.

# KEY LESSONS

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- Acknowledge the importance of seafarers as essential workers, and facilitate crew change at all levels
- Provide better and easier to access health provisions, and reduce associated mental health stigma,
- Enhance company communications to help people understand the underlying logic behind decisions, and
- Better disease management support and treatment of seafarers during and after quarantine.



# Thank you

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