

# The Welfare of Superyacht Crew







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## Forewords

Work on superyachts provides exciting opportunities for men and women. Working for rich clients can provide interest and job satisfaction, including visiting some beautiful places and enjoying voyages on stunning boats. On the downside are the long hours when clients or owners are on board, the need to maintain perfect poise and deal with difficult situations at times of tiredness, and the need to keep going regardless of one's physical or mental health. Yacht captains have a wealth of experience and many of them will stay in the industry for decades, treading the difficult line of providing standards close to perfection for discerning clients, and at the same time having responsibility for the crew they manage. For them – and for most seafarers on yachts – the plus side hugely outweighs the negative aspects, and this should be remembered when reading this report. This research is an effort to get behind the façade (which is very solid in all areas of the maritime industry) and find out what kind of services might be provided to superyacht crew from established maritime welfare agencies. Are there gaps in provision which could be filled? Where do superyacht crew seek improvements, and can the maritime welfare industry add value, with a background of 200 years of history of working alongside commercial seafarers? ISWAN hopes that this report will take the discussion forward to the benefit of the seafarers of all ranks working on superyachts.

**Roger Harris, Executive Director,  
International Seafarers' Welfare  
& Assistance Network (ISWAN)**

MHG Insurance Brokers, the marine industry's crew insurance authority, partnered with the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), earlier this year to learn more about welfare issues affecting seafarers working onboard superyachts. To do so, MHG commissioned a survey to elicit honest feedback from crew in an anonymous format. Questions pertaining to crew health and well-being to living conditions onboard were asked in order to determine whether or not existing welfare structures meet seafarer needs, in addition to identifying areas for improvement. MHG introduced benefits to the marine industry in 1991 in an effort to make the industry a better place for seafarers' to work and live. Over 25 years later, that passion still holds true for us. The welfare of all crew, not just the many who are insured with MHG, is a primary concern for us. The mental and physical health and well-being of these seafarers is not just a professional interest. We want to know better what makes them tick and how their time at sea can be improved. After an overwhelming response, we are excited to share the survey results with the yachting community.

**Andrew Dudzinski,  
Chairman & CEO,  
MHG Insurance Brokers**

The Mission to Seafarers is very pleased that this important piece of work has been carried out. We look forward very much to subsequent discussions and are keen to explore ways in which we might be involved in offering appropriate support where that is necessary. As Secretary General, I have a personal interest. My own youngest daughter has been working in the industry, as a stewardess, for more than ten years. Her many stories reflect both the opportunities and the many challenges of this very particular maritime environment. It is a world which can be both exciting and demanding – and there can be very significant pressures. It is also an area which has seen much growth in recent years – and perhaps has slipped under the radar of most of the maritime welfare organisation. This report will help put some important issues on the map.

**Revd Andrew Wright,  
Secretary General,  
The Mission to Seafarers**

## Introduction

The superyacht<sup>1</sup> industry is booming. In the UK alone, the sector contributes more than £450m to GDP<sup>2</sup> and as the industry grows, so too does the need to recruit and retain quality crew. Although the yacht sector, like the rest of the maritime industry, is expected to become increasingly automated, human crew will still be needed and valued because of the ethos of ensuring a high level of customer service to owners and charterers.

Although typically described by the sector as a 'dream job', working onboard a superyacht is not without its challenges, most notably long hours and job insecurity. In past decades the sector has become more regulated. Most recently, the 2006 Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) set out employment conditions and accommodation for seafarers,<sup>3</sup> which includes superyacht crew onboard commercial (but not private) vessels – at least on paper. Changing practice on superyachts, out of sight, is not easy and scope for improvement remains, as this report makes clear.

Mainstream media<sup>4</sup> interest in the superyacht sector has revealed its darker side, as has the recent PYA (Professional Yachting Association) study on sexual harassment. This side must be acknowledged, as must the calls for change from many people working in the industry. However, we are keen not to 'make victims' of superyacht crew. We highlight the many positives of superyacht work and are clear that this work is a choice made by men and women who want to be in this industry. At a time when recruitment and retention are

increasingly important, the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), MHG Insurance Brokers, and the Mission to Seafarers have joined forces to explore the major welfare needs of superyacht crew, how these needs are being met, where improvements might be made and where opportunities exist for superyacht crew to make better use of welfare structures that already support other types of seafarers. Both ISWAN and the Mission to Seafarers are established welfare organisations keen to increase their support of superyacht crew. MHG has experience of crew issues and the resulting insurance claims and also wishes to see improvements in the treatment of people in this sector.

Compared to other maritime professionals, the welfare of superyacht crew has received little attention. This is partly because superyacht crew have tended to not be grouped in the same category as seafarers working aboard other types of vessels: superyacht crew have professionalised far more recently than other seafarers and are not – for example – currently covered by any collective bargaining agreement between employer(s) and a maritime trade union. Superyacht crew are mainly well paid and predominantly from the Global North. Nonetheless, superyacht crew experience many of the same challenges as seafarers in the wider maritime industry, as well as some that are specific to the superyacht sector. Understanding the nature and extent of these challenges will help superyacht crew benefit from good practice developed in other parts of the industry as well as highlight sector-specific areas for improvement.

1. A 'superyacht' is a commercially operated luxury yacht (motor or sail powered), which is professionally crewed and has a loadline length of 24 metres or more.

2. 2017 figures from trade body Superyacht UK. The UK's Department of Transport estimates 19,000 UK nationals to be employed in the sector in 2018. UK figures are given as illustrative – employment data on the industry as a whole is hard to come by.

3. See Yachting Pages' useful 'Crew Guide to the Maritime Labour Convention' (2018): <http://www.yachting-pages.com/content/crew-guide-to-the-maritime-labour-convention-mlc.html>

4. For example: i) 'Lost on the outlaw seas: the dangerous treatment of staff on superyachts', Annosh Chakelian, The New Statesman, 4 January 2016: <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/business/2016/01/lost-outlaw-seas-dangerous-treatment-staff-superyachts>

ii) 'Life and death on a superyacht: "If something goes wrong, they can just raise the anchor and leave"', Rupert Neate, The Guardian, 26 May 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/may/26/superyachts-something-goes-wrong-raise-the-anchor>

## What is seafarers' welfare?

Seafarers are mobile workers who work away from normal support networks of home and family. For them, the ship or boat is their home as well as their place of work. This work is a choice but it places them in an occupation where the risks of death, injury and illness are higher than those facing the general population. Maritime charities have existed for some 200 years and have worked with governments, unions and shipowners to improve life at sea, through regulation and good practice. Current seafarers welfare involves ensuring seafarers can communicate with their loved ones and that they have the tools they need to stay physically, mentally and spiritually healthy during their time away from home. Shipboard health is a function of education and motivation of seafarers, good practice by employers and input from external agencies (unions, NGOs, service providers). Shore-based welfare facilities also help seafarers with practical assistance (shopping, sightseeing, medical, legal, communication) and ship-visiting provides a link with someone active in the welfare of seafarers within a specific port.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the crew and other professionals who found time in long working weeks to take part in this research, as well as those who helped to promote the survey. Particular thanks to MHG Insurance Brokers for their funding of the work.

**Thank you also to Inmarsat for sponsoring our launch seminar.**



## Methods

This report is based upon data collected via a 50-question, online survey that was designed by an independent researcher in collaboration with the three partner organisations. The survey was open between June and October 2018 and promoted worldwide via the partner organisations' networks, trade press and social media. In total, 441 superyacht crew responded to the survey. 39 entries were removed because they contained insufficient data, which would have skewed the overall findings. The 'clean' survey data therefore comprised 402 complete or almost complete responses. If a proportion of this 402 skipped a question or section of questions, this is noted in the discussion of findings.

In addition, the researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six crew and two industry insiders and sourced three crew to also provide extended diary studies. Diary studies comprised a minimum of eight (not necessarily consecutive) entries of at least 400 words or two minutes' recorded time each, in response to a topic guide provided by the researcher. Crew who took part in interviews or diary studies were offered retail vouchers as a token of appreciation for their time. Crew participating in any part of the research were provided with GDPR information and asked to complete a consent form (both of which are available from ISWAN).

Although this report is informed by several hundred pages of collected data, the numbers involved in the research are not a sufficient proportion of the overall

superyacht crew population to be taken as more than a snapshot of the current state of affairs. This research was designed to capture participants' own views about what needs improving, in their own words, rather than to provide a comprehensive assessment of every aspect of superyacht crew welfare; not least because welfare covers many different topics. This report is designed to provide owners and management companies, which have perhaps experienced problems onboard and difficulties retaining crew, with starting suggestions for where they might look to make improvements. As much as possible and where appropriate, the findings have been benchmarked against previous research, most notably that conducted by SIRC on behalf of the PYA in 2010.<sup>5</sup>

There are a few further points to note. Data from each survey question has been checked for any insightful differences between the responses of men and women and between captain and other ranks and these differences have been reported in the findings that follow. When quotations cited come from captains, this is also noted. Percentages cited in the report have been rounded to the nearest whole number. The words 'superyacht' and 'yacht' are used interchangeably (see the definition in footnote one). Minor typos have been corrected in data and quotes without, we hope, changing the intended meaning. Each survey page guided respondents about whether the questions related to their current/most recent yacht or their wider yachting career but it is likely that not all respondents took heed of this.

5. Bailey, N., Ellis, N. & Sampson, H. (2010) 'SIRC Report to the PYA on Living and Working Conditions Aboard Yachts', Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC), Cardiff University.

## Executive summary

- 60% of respondents reported no issues accessing physical (as opposed to dental or mental) healthcare, although 26% said that this was sometimes a problem and 13% said it was a regular challenge. Accessing physical healthcare was more of an issue for women than for men: 18% of female respondents and 11% of male respondents found this a regular challenge. 53% of female respondents and 65% of male respondents had never had a problem accessing physical healthcare.
- Accessing dental care was never a problem for 60% of respondents, sometimes an issue for 26% and a regular challenge for 23%.
- Accessing mental health care was more of an issue for women than for men, with 55% of female respondents reporting this to be an occasional or regular challenge, compared to 28% of men (or 37% of both male and female respondents).
- 80% of female respondents reported suffering from one or more episode of work-related stress, compared to 54% of men.
- 48% of respondents had religious or spiritual needs that are not fully met in port/at sea.
- 74% did not feel that their intake of alcohol was a problem (which might include non drinkers), 19% felt their drinking was 'sometimes a problem' and 7% said they would like to drink less or stop drinking altogether.
- 55% of respondents were aware of illegal drug use among crew.
- In port, 93% of male respondents 'usually' or 'always' felt safe, compared to 84% of women. Onboard, 97% of men felt safe 'usually' or 'always', compared to 90% of women.
- 82% of respondents had experienced low crew morale 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always'.





- 62% of respondents had experienced problems with onboard leadership 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always', compared to 38% of captains. When split by gender, this equated to 77% of women and 55% of men.
- 45% of respondents said they had suffered from social isolation or loneliness 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' while working onboard yachts. This equated to 57% of women and 39% of men.
- 53% of women said they had experienced discrimination, harassment or bullying from owner/crew/guests 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always', compared to 30% of men, most commonly from captains or other senior crew.
- 67% of respondents 'usually' or 'always' felt rested in port. This fell to 35% whilst at sea. Crew aboard larger yachts appeared to fare worse in this regard.
- Unsurprisingly, having guests onboard influenced crew's ability to get ashore. 17% of respondents said they could 'usually' or 'always' get ashore when guests were present. This rose to 85% when guests were not onboard.
- 51% of respondents were satisfied with their leave entitlement.
- 83% of respondents were satisfied with the degree of variation in their role.
- 75% of respondents were 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never' able to plan shore-based appointments and activities sufficiently in advance because of yachts' unpredictable itineraries.
- 75% of respondents 'often' or 'always' worked more than contracted hours and this seems to have been more of an issue the smaller the yacht/crew. Only 5% of respondents received overtime pay.
- More storage', 'more space', 'a bigger bed' and 'not having to share' were the improvements to cabins that respondents selected most often.
- 63% of respondents wanted a budget for crew social/recreational activities.
- 74% of respondents wanted more reliable internet connection onboard.
- 79% of respondents were on permanent contracts; 21% were on fixed-term contracts.
- 25% of respondents were confident that their contracts stipulated at least 16 weeks of paid sick-leave entitlement.
- 22% of respondents' employers provided additional insurance to cover the cost of their respondents' salary should they remain sick for longer than the period specified in their contract of employment.
- Approximately half of those with this additional insurance also had separate protection in respect of medical expenses or sick pay, such as that provided by a home-country social system or individual insurance policy. 35% of all respondents to this question had this protection.
- 19% of respondents made – and/or received from their employer – payments towards a (public or private) pension scheme.
- 8% of respondents were confident that they were entitled to paid/unpaid maternity/paternity leave.
- 26% of respondents were confident that they were entitled to paid compassionate leave and 17% to unpaid compassionate leave.
- 61% of respondents had been asked to sign non-disclosure agreements and 9% of these felt this to be problematic.

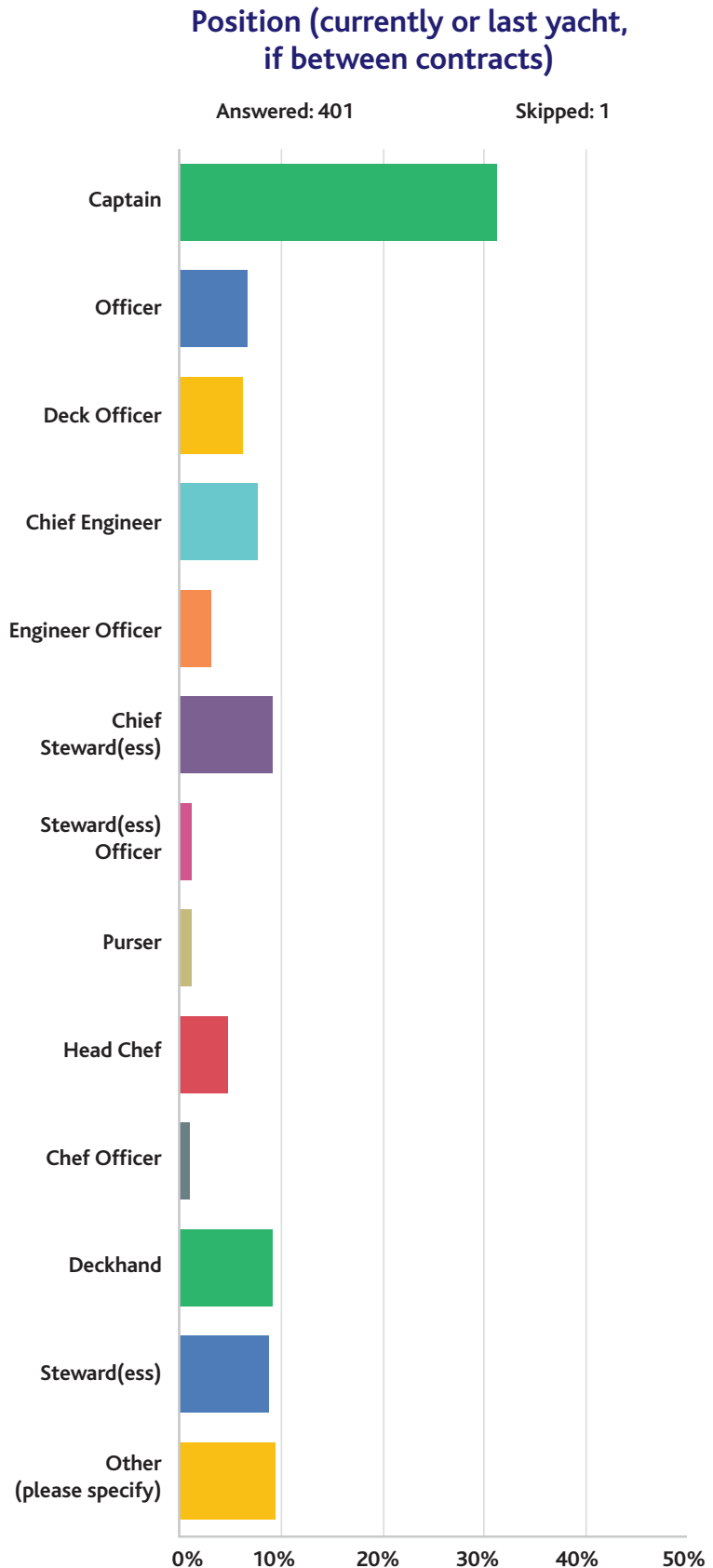
# Research findings

## About the respondents

- Crew responding to the survey were aged between 21 and '75+' (which was taken as 75 when calculating the mean), with an average (mean) age of 37.
- 66% of respondents were male and 34% female.
- 54% were single, 41% married and 5% separated or divorced. When split by gender, 68% of female and 48% of male respondents were single and 25% of female and 49% of male respondents were married.
- 22% had dependent children and 78% did not (although might have had children over 18 years of age). Only 6% of female respondents had dependent children, compared to 30% of male respondents.
- Respondents had 39 nationalities between them, the most represented of which were British (139 respondents), American (USA) (51 respondents), South African (36 respondents), Australian (24 respondents), New Zealander (19 respondents) and Italian (15 respondents).

Nine or fewer respondents were nationals of each of the following countries: Ireland, Germany, Canada, France, Poland, Mexico, Spain, Philippines, Russia, Belgium, Croatia, Greece, India, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, Denmark, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Colombia, Czech Republic, Finland, Lithuania, Peru, Romania, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Zimbabwe (in order of frequency).

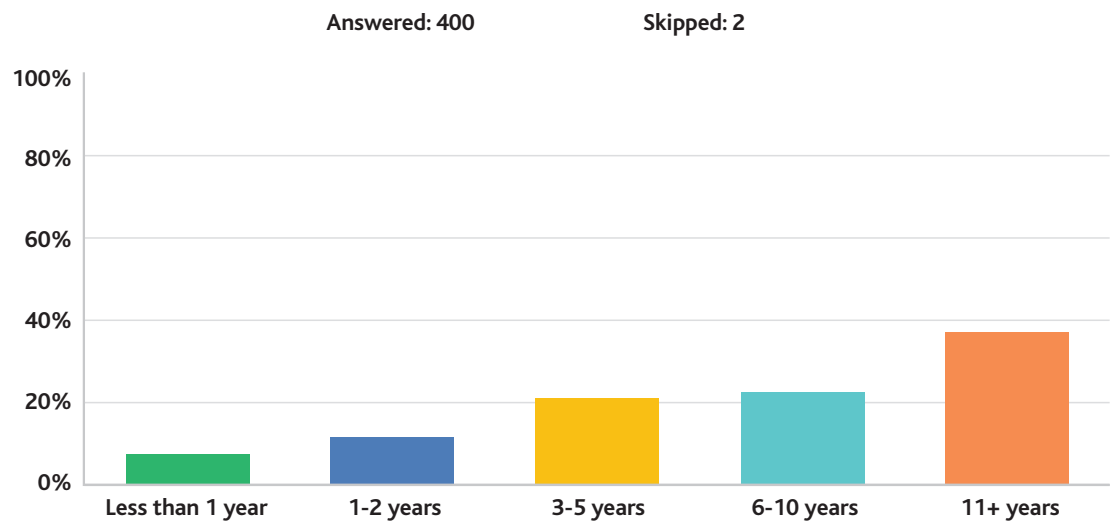
- Senior crew are over-represented among respondents and 31% were captains – three of whom (2%) were women.



Respondents' other positions, representing less than 10% of respondents in total, were: 'master', 'retired captain', first mate, mate, mate/engineer, deck cadet (officer), bosun, sole deckhand, second engineer, ordinary seaman, deck/stewardess, cook/stewardess, sous chef, sole chef, head housekeeper, sole stewardess, electronic technical officer, AV/IT officers, nurse, masseuse, masseuse/housekeeping stewardess, masseuse/stewardess/dog caregiver, 'greenie'.

- Respondents were experienced superyacht crew: 81% had more than three years' experience working onboard superyachts and 37% had more than 11 years' experience.

### For how many years have you worked onboard superyachts



- In addition, this experience was live or recent: 78% of respondents currently worked onboard a yacht and a further 17% had done so within the past three years.

The profile of respondents is comparable to that of respondents' to the SIRC/PYA 2010 research (see footnote five) in terms of age, gender, marital status, experience, rank and nationality.

## About the respondents' yachts

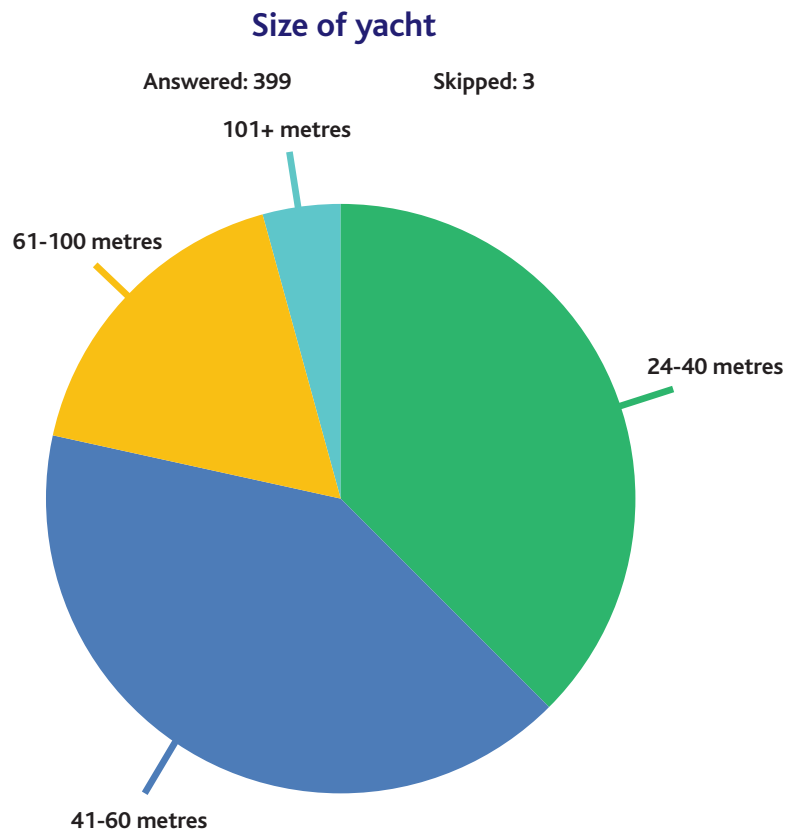
Respondents were asked about the size and nature of their current or most recent yacht. (The results are almost identical to the figures accessed by SIRC/PYA (2010) research, except for crew size, which the latter does not cover.)

- Crew size ranged from 2 to 100, with an average (mean) of 12. As would be expected, the size of crew correlates with the size of yacht.
- 83% of the yachts described were motor, 17% sail.
- 78% worked aboard yachts that were 60 metres or less.

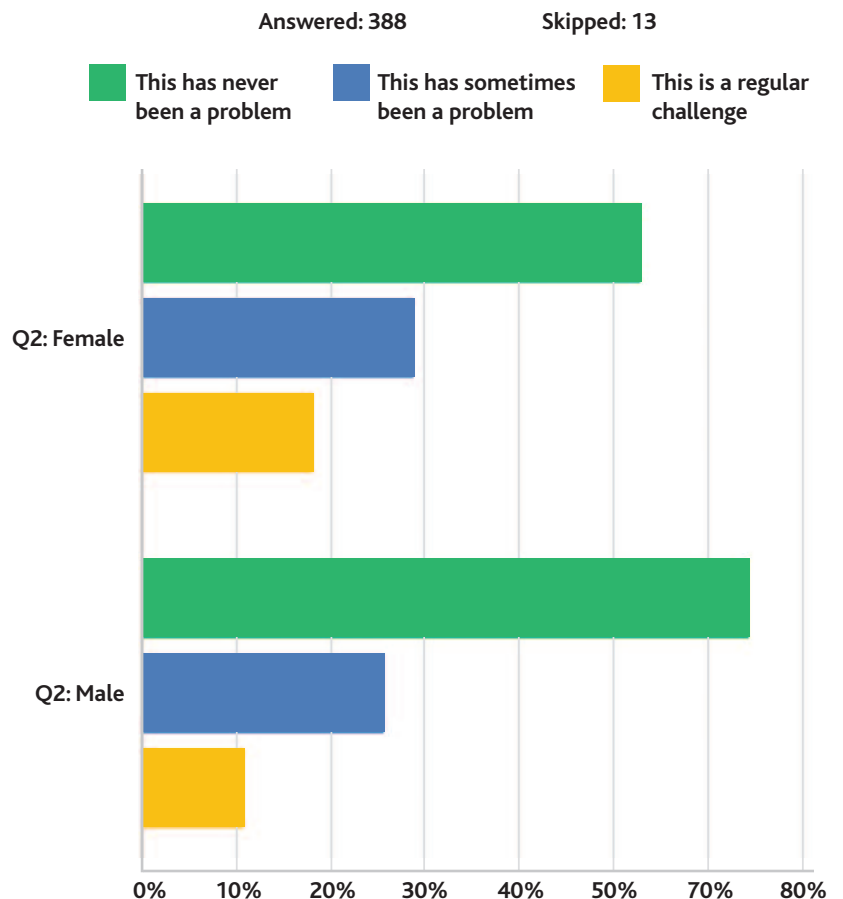
## Health, wellbeing and safety

- 60% of respondents reported no issues accessing physical (as opposed to dental or mental) healthcare, although 26% said that this was sometimes a problem and 13% said it was a regular challenge. Accessing medical attention was more of an issue for women than for men: 18% of female respondents and 11% of male respondents found this a regular challenge and 53% of female respondents and 65% of male respondents had never had a problem accessing physical healthcare.

Not all respondents had health insurance provided (see 'terms of employment' section below) and several commented that policies did not cover the locations they visited or previous work-related conditions or injuries, even if successfully treated. 'Insurance provided by the yacht should be mandatory and not subject to a probationary period' read one survey comment. An interviewee felt that crew should be more insistent if insurance is not offered: *"I made them include the name and number of a medical insurance policy before I signed."*



## Are you satisfied with your ability to access (physical) healthcare during your contract?



One respondent commented that making a claim was complicated and another that they were unsure how to find a physician they could trust. For many, the main problem was getting time off work to see a medical professional – especially for anything preventative, minor or routine – and if they could, they typically had to make up the missed time. 'The key – as with everything – is to choose your captain well', said one diary study participant:

*"...so that they stick up for you and get you the care you need. There was even one girl who was diagnosed with breast cancer and she was flown to Istanbul for her surgery, all paid for, and then lived with the owners to recover! But then I've also seen a colleague lose part of his thumb in an injury at work and that wasn't covered."*

Staff at ISWAN's helpline for seafarers, SeafarerHelp, reported receiving a call from a yacht crew member whose captain denied them time to access help for back pain and from others seeking advice on paying medical fees.

A resounding message emerging from the survey, interviews and diary studies is that crew put up with ailments and even extreme injuries and are all often let go if unfit for work or if they request too much time for medical attention, as this quote illustrates:

*"All yachts have their ups and downs as with any job but my previous boat...fired me for being sick and refused to clarify in writing what was owed to me and what position I was in."*

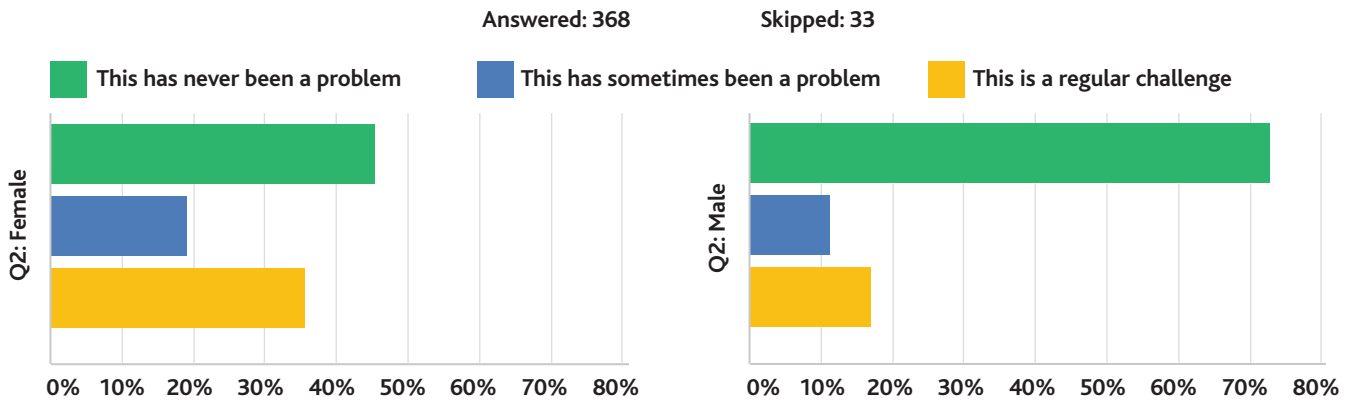
- Accessing dental care was a regular challenge for 23%, sometimes an issue for 26% and never a problem for 60% of respondents.

Several commented that dental work was rarely covered by crew insurance policies (if provided). Those crew with dental cover had typically bought their own plan or deferred treatment – if possible – until home on leave – or simply did not maintain routine check ups. Other comments related to the challenge of getting time off the boat for dental work/care and not knowing how to find quality provision away from home.



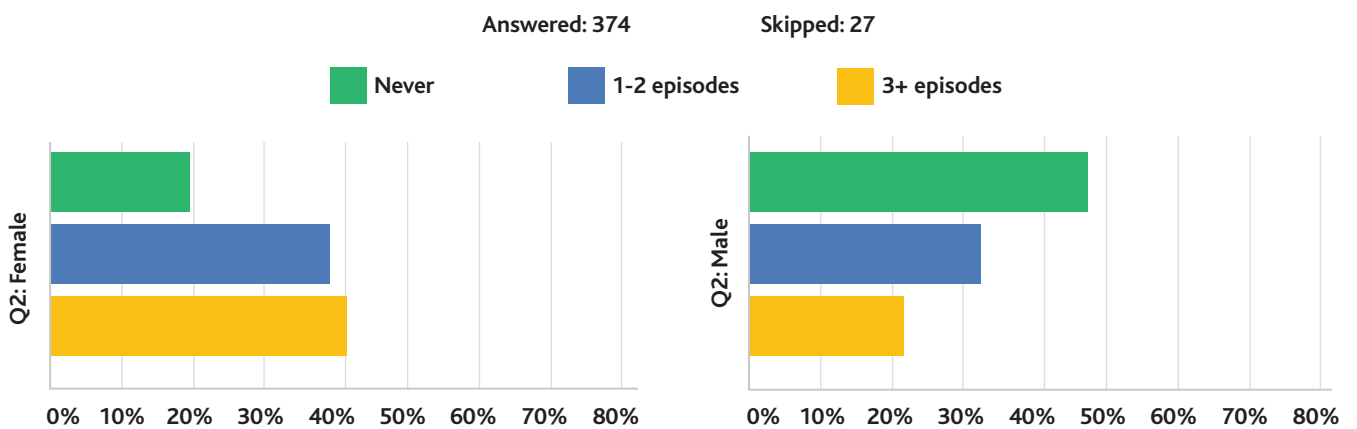
- Accessing mental health care was more of an issue for women than for men, with 55% of female respondents reporting this to be an occasional or regular challenge, compared to 28% of men (or 37% of both male and female respondents).

### Are you satisfied with your ability to access (mental) healthcare during your contract?



- Related, respondents were also asked whether they had ever suffered from work-related stress. 80% of female respondents reported suffering from one or more episode, compared to 54% of men and 49% of captains. Chief stewardesses and stewardesses fared the worst, with 91% reporting suffering from one or more episode.

### Have you ever suffered from work-related stress?



This figures roughly correlate with those produced from a survey into the mental health of superyacht crew conducted by Yachting Pages Media Group. 72% of the crew surveyed had suffered from mental health problems or knew someone else in the industry who had. Only 54% of this group had talked about their issue and 70% said no support was in place to help with stress or wider mental health onboard. 75% of those surveyed felt the industry was not doing enough to address mental ill-health and crew welfare needs.<sup>6</sup> The SIRC/PYA (2010) research puts the figures even higher: 94% of crew surveyed had experienced work-related stress at least occasionally, 54% had experienced this often, 22% very often and 11% always.

6. 'Mental health falling under the radar say superyacht crew', Sophie Allen, Yachting Pages Media Group, 14 May 2014: [http://www.yachting-pages.com/superyacht\\_news/mental-health-falling-under-radar-superyacht-crew.html](http://www.yachting-pages.com/superyacht_news/mental-health-falling-under-radar-superyacht-crew.html).

Several respondents to our survey remarked that they were not sure what form mental support would take and doubted any cost would be covered by insurance. Many assumed that mental health problems must be rife among colleagues, given the conditions of yachting they described: long hours, lack of sleep, little down time or time for exercise, little privacy, confined space and often poor communication and dynamics between and among crew, as well as a 'macho' culture in which mental health is a taboo that would likely result in being fired if flagged. 'I would never try to raise this!' said one. 'If someone is mentally unstable then I would say a yacht at sea is not the correct career choice', said another. Another commented that they could not bring up mental ill-health with the captain if problems with leadership had been part of the problem.

A number of respondents shared their experiences or those of others: one was on leave with post-traumatic stress disorder, another was signed-off with depression and then fired, another told of fellow crew member committing suicide whilst on leave. Other comments included:

*"I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression from the stress of my last boat. I had physical reactions as well."*

*"I regularly had anxiety attacks on board when very stressed. When I did one of my ENG 1s [medical] the doctor told me I need to stress less as she could pick up the cortisol in my urine."*

*"I ended up quitting due to stress and depression. You were often reminded how replaceable you were and made fearful for your job on a regular basis."*

*"There are quite a few people with psychological discomforts, for want of a better term, who could benefit from having professionals to talk to. But it's not done very often, it's not encouraged and it's certainly not paid for. An injury is one thing but someone*

*who needs some psychological assistance – well we'd prefer our crew not to need that. Come on! Look at what we do in this industry – the conditions, the hours, the stress, the strains – it's a very, very real aspect of being a crew member – your psychological wellbeing – and I do feel it's neglected."*

One commented that distinct episodes of work-related stress were difficult to identify since stress was pervasive and constant. 'It comes with the job' was the overarching sentiment. 'Breakdowns due to tiredness and stress were quite common towards the end of the season' reported one respondent. *"This is yachting"* said another:

*"I think there are very few crew that haven't [experienced stress] – even if it has never fully emerged. I think the industry unfortunately is very toxic and has stress associated with many factors, and the answer as seen by many is 'deal with it or leave'. Often you need to take significant time off between boats to fully get back to being well rested and in a good mind frame."*

Respondents were also asked whether they felt that their religious or spiritual needs – if any – were met at sea and in port. This question provoked some strong reactions. 'You need to understand you are here to work, not pray five times a day' said one respondent. Comments from captains included:

*"Really? Since when did religion become a topic in a seafarers life? As an American this survey must have been written by an American."*

*"Religion and spiritual needs do not belong in the workplace."*

80 out of 402 skipped the question altogether – perhaps because they have no faith or related needs – which was a comment made by many of those who did respond to this question. The question is poorly worded: those with no religious or spiritual needs could

have logically answered either 'never' or 'always'. The three middle categories ('usually', 'sometimes', 'rarely') are hence the most revealing – since they indicate a need that's not entirely met – among 48% of respondents. Women fare slightly worse at 46% compared to 53% for men. Survey and interview comments included:

*"I pray in my cabin, which my roommate respects. If there's an opportunity to go to church on a Sunday I can swap my watch with someone."*

*"Our captain was supportive of a muslim member of our crew having time for Friday prayers – but this colleague understood that there would be some busy days when he couldn't go."*

*"Who ever gets given the time to go away and meditate on their own? You're seen as 'unsocial' or 'not a team player' if you're not joining the crew to go off and get drunk somewhere on your days off."*

*"As a committed Christian, it can be hard to find time to get to church/meet with others"* (comment made by a captain).

*"Actually, if I try to do so it would be the joke of the day."*

*"I sometimes find a church to go to when we're in port, but I'm usually working on Sundays."*

*"Not religious so I can't answer. But there are instances where if crew are a certain religion they are passed over for a job. There are no provisions for prayer rooms, etc. onboard. And as most yachts don't go to regular ports there aren't many port facilities to use."*

*"It is still a topic that is not as popular as it needs to be. I believe this is also due to the testosterone-fuelled working environment, with many more men than women."*

*"Not religious but even finding time to reflect spiritually is tough."*



*"Saudi Arabia does not allow non-Islamic religious gatherings."*

This survey question was not intended to gauge the level of faith or spirituality of crew but rather the potential for yacht crew to make (better) use of facilities and support offered to the wider seafaring population from the global network of maritime welfare organisations, many of which have a Christian underpinning.

Two questions asked respondents about alcohol and illegal drug use. The first question was intentionally worded to elicit respondents' own attitudes towards their drinking, rather than any objective measure:

- 74% did not feel that their drinking was a problem (which might include non drinkers), 19% felt their drinking was 'sometimes a problem but mostly it's ok' and 7% said they would like to drink less or stop drinking altogether – and it is this group that should be the focus of any intervention.

Many respondents' comments described a culture of drinking – 'alcohol is definitely encouraged!' said one. 'Drinking is a problem in this industry', said another and several respondents said they had given up drinking altogether.



- Respondents were also asked whether they were aware of illegal drug use among crew (at any point in their career). 55% said 'yes' and 45% said 'no'.

The wording was intentionally non-incriminating although captains might have been reluctant to admit knowing about illegal drug onboard a boat in case it suggested that they fail to act in relation to a boat under their command. 48% of captains said they knew of illegal drug use among crew; 52% said they were unaware.

Comments and interview insights indicated that illegal drug use is widespread in yachting. For example:

*“Cocaine was regularly taken, especially when people were working up to 16 hour days.”*

*“Drug-taking is a big problem. Mostly coke – I think because it’s out of the system quite quickly. There was one boat, there were a lot of prostitutes and the owner and most of the crew were using drugs so I felt like an outsider. Eight crossings of the Atlantic and we were never searched. It was in Cuba – around 2015/16 – that we were*

*properly searched with dogs and everything and we were shitting ourselves. We were lucky.”*

*“Half the vessels in Rybovich, Palm Harbor Marina and various marinas in Fort Lauderdale have rampant drug problems. Cocaine, opioids as well as marijuana are widely used, even by captains. It’s even worse in English Harbor in Antigua and St Maarten.”*

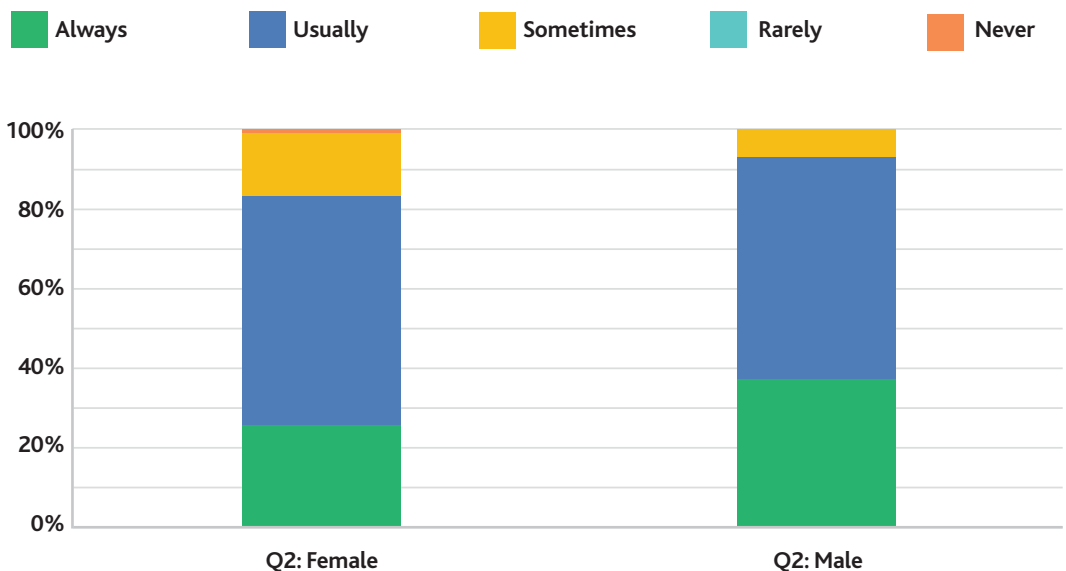
Numerous comments talked about captains turning a blind eye to drug use or in some cases, partaking themselves but it is not possible to gauge the extent of this from these comments alone. Comments made by captains tended to be along the lines of 'yes but not on my boat'. They made it clear that illegal drug use would result in sacking and many said they asked for random drug testing from their crew (a question remains about whether captains are also tested and by whom).

- Respondents were asked whether they felt safe onboard and in port. These two questions produced slight differences between men and women. In port, 93% of male respondents 'usually' or 'always' felt safe, compared to 84% of women.

### Do you feel safe in port?

Answered: 388

Skipped: 13



The comments made clear that some locations felt safer than others and also that being at anchor and relying on others to ferry one back and forth, felt less safe than being moored in port. One respondent said that shipyard areas felt particularly unsafe. Another pointed out that yachts do tend to attract attention, not all of it benign. Only one reported experiencing an actual yacht break in.

- Onboard, 97% of men felt safe 'usually' or 'always', compared to 90% of women. Comments related to poor regard for safety procedures, personal threats, poor decision making, a lack of professionalism and the threat of piracy. For example:

*"Safety was an issue on board, regulations were sometimes not properly followed, and I was made to work above my station unsupervised (at one point I was left in charge of the engine department in a drydock with no guidance and only shortly after having qualified as third engineer)."*

*"Haven't had a safety walk around and I've been onboard for three months."*

*"Except on current vessel. Safety is disregarded. Crew should do many more drills on a boat especially on boats with high crew turn over."*

*"I was fired for talking to management about safety concerns then not paid in full and had no help from the flag state."*

*"Depends on the rest of the crew. I've had drunk male crew members come back on board fighting with each other, punching in doors, throwing drinking glasses around. Other occasions I've had male crew members unlock my cabin door from the outside to try to get into bed with me."*

*"Have been verbally attacked a lot and recently grabbed and entrapped so I could not get away from another verbal attack."*

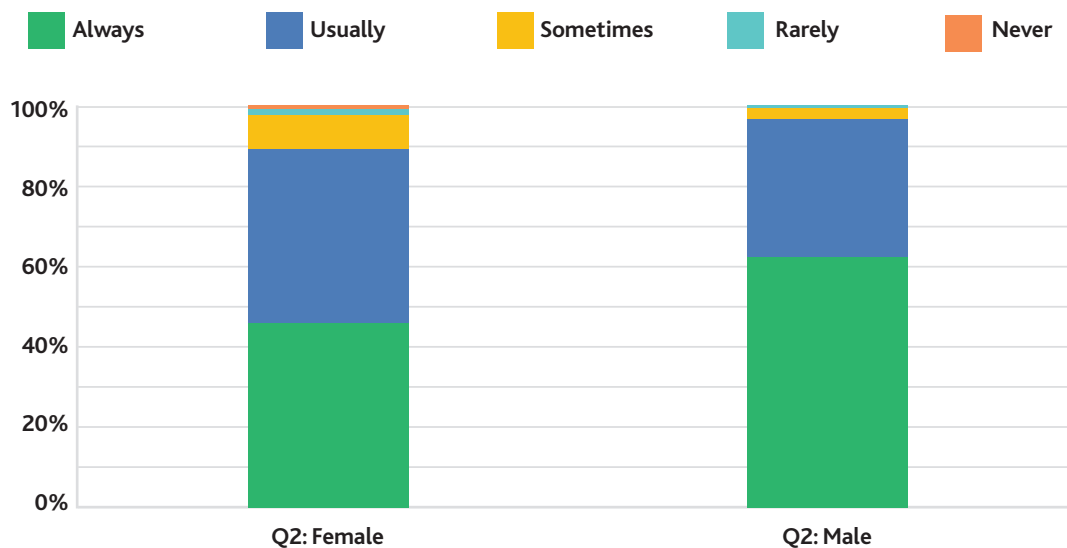
*"On certain boats the level of drinking/drugs/behaviour of people in higher roles can have a negative influence on the rest of the crew."*

*"I want drills to be more realistic – to actually do the tasks required rather than just talk them through – and we're not always going to be awake, dressed and present when something goes wrong – and there's a lot that can go wrong. And we need to know more about each other's roles so that if it's the chief engineer who's injured, we know enough to step in. There's a lot we could learn from the commercial industry."*

### Do you feel safe onboard?

Answered: 388

Skipped: 13



## Leadership and crew dynamics

Approximately 29 out of 402 respondents skipped this section.

- 82% of respondents had experienced low crew morale 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always'.

Comments attribute this to a variety of factors, most typically poor onboard leadership and lack of management company involvement or influence, as well as lack of sleep, heavy workloads, inadequate shared facilities for crew, and/or 'stagnant' or 'boring' itineraries. One added that delays in salary payment can lower morale, as

can a lack of shore leave, said another. To quote a spokesperson from Nautilus, a union that represents superyacht (among other maritime) professionals, 'a lack of collectivism in the sector doesn't help'.

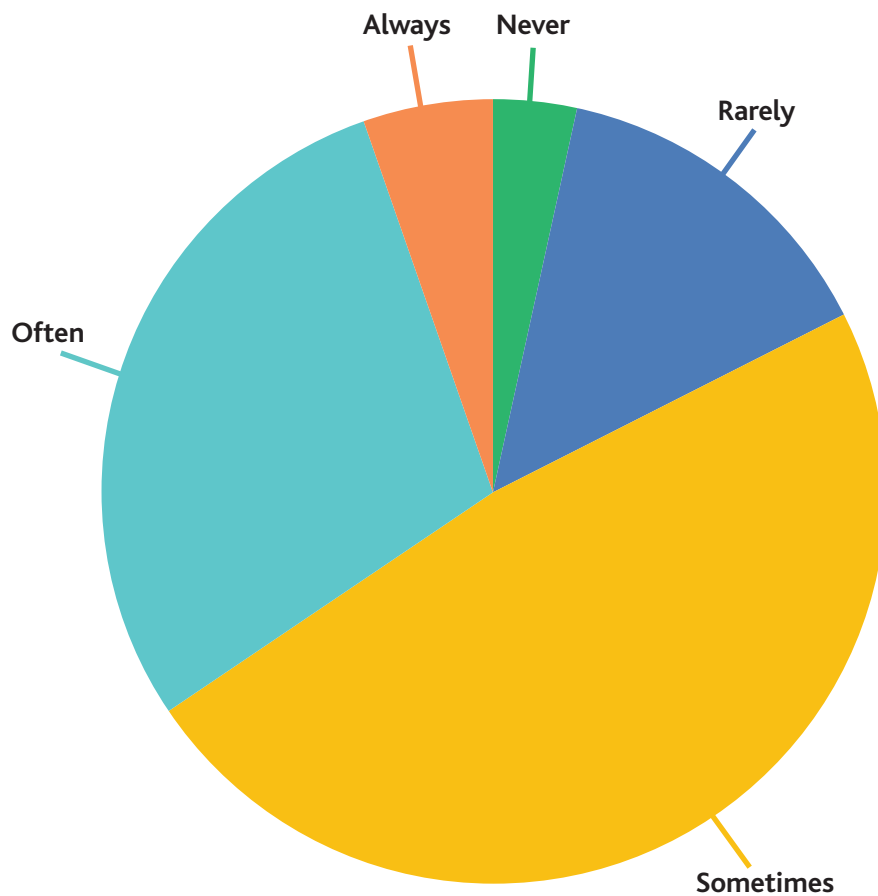
As the following quote describes, low morale can escalate and affect crew retention:

*"It shocked me to see how used to low morale the crew had become and just how unhappy many people were onboard but due to the way the vessel was run, people wouldn't speak out and often left due to stress. Thus there was a large turn over of crew."*

### Have you ever experienced low crew morale?

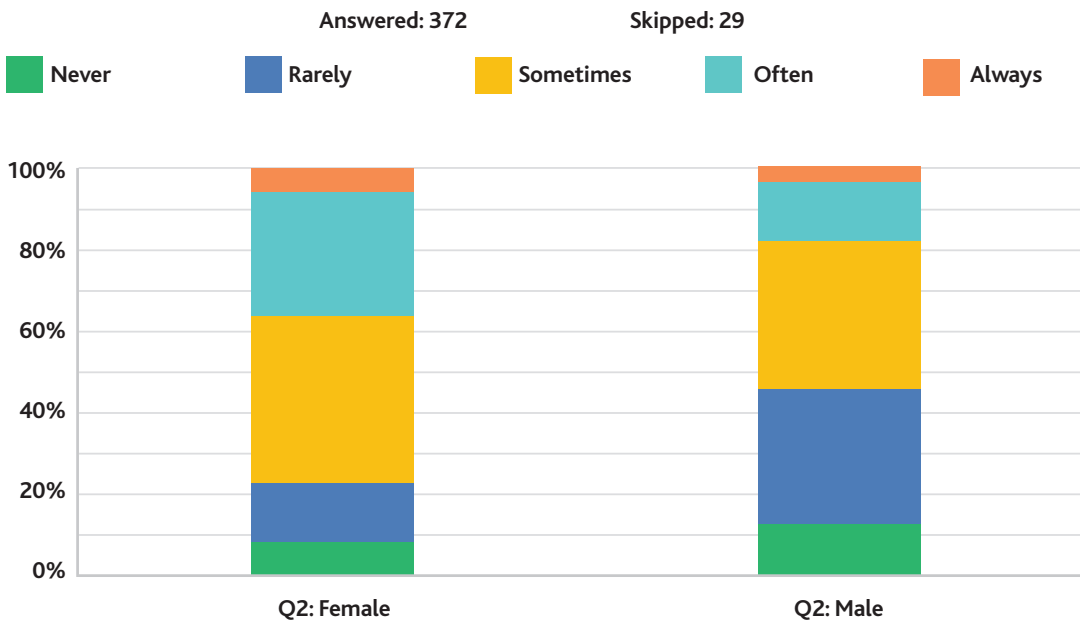
Answered: 376

Skipped: 26



- 62% of respondents had experienced problems with onboard leadership 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always', compared to 38% of captains. When split by gender, this equated to 77% of women and 55% of men.

### Have you experienced problems with leadership onboard?



'If you have a good captain, it's everything', explained an interviewee:

*"... One who says that the jetskis need testing or 'who's not been to Dubrovnik? So let's make time to stop off there on the way'. I had one great first officer – he was caring, a great leader, he nurtured everyone – everyone wanted to work with him again – but that was an exception. I've also seen the opposite."*

*"You can work your arse off and still be reviewed as lazy and negative. That's just not me but it was because I didn't get on with the captain's partner who was the chief stew. In those situations, she's really the one who rules the boat. That was a turning point and when I started thinking there was no point – no point in working so hard to train others if it's not recognised. You deal with this stuff or you leave."*

To quote from a survey comment:

*"I believe I am lucky to work for a reasonable owner, where the captain has a good line of communication and any issues are discussed. Crew are well provided for when it comes to food, salary, holidays and healthcare. I believe it's the captain's duty of care to see to it that the crew are looked after, the ones who don't, have problems."*

*"The notice of termination is four weeks and is always highly stacked in favor of the management company: we can be let go for having a bad hairstyle or if the owner doesn't like your face. We have no rights to argue. Warnings or written warnings are done at the master's discretion. Captains have too much power on yachts and a lot of them abuse the power too much, too often. Masters and chief engineers are supposed to be on an even par so if one is the problem, the other can act."*

As these quotes suggest, leadership involves not only captains but also other senior crew, owners and management companies, all of which vary in their experience, attitudes and practices. 'Our owner is a first time yacht owner who now lives onboard and travels worldwide', read a survey comment from a captain: 'I believe he does not comprehend the demands on the crew, seeing the travel as a kind of paid holiday rather than a challenging job'. The effects of leadership are also shaped by the size of a yacht and interviewees spoke of being 'more valued and made to feel like part of the family' on small, private yachts compared to the more 'military' style of larger boats. 'You also have each other's back and help out with jobs – it's not so mutually exclusive.'

'The problem' with leadership, as one respondent commented, is that 'most senior crew onboard yachts have never received any formal training for workforce management. They have simply worked their way up by years of experience and tickets.' To 'do ticket', explains another, relates to the 'old-school who've worked their way up. They resent the sense of entitlement

and lack of training/experience of a newer generation. When you can work 3am-3pm with just 15 mins for breakfast, I kind of get that. And you do find that in other industries too.'

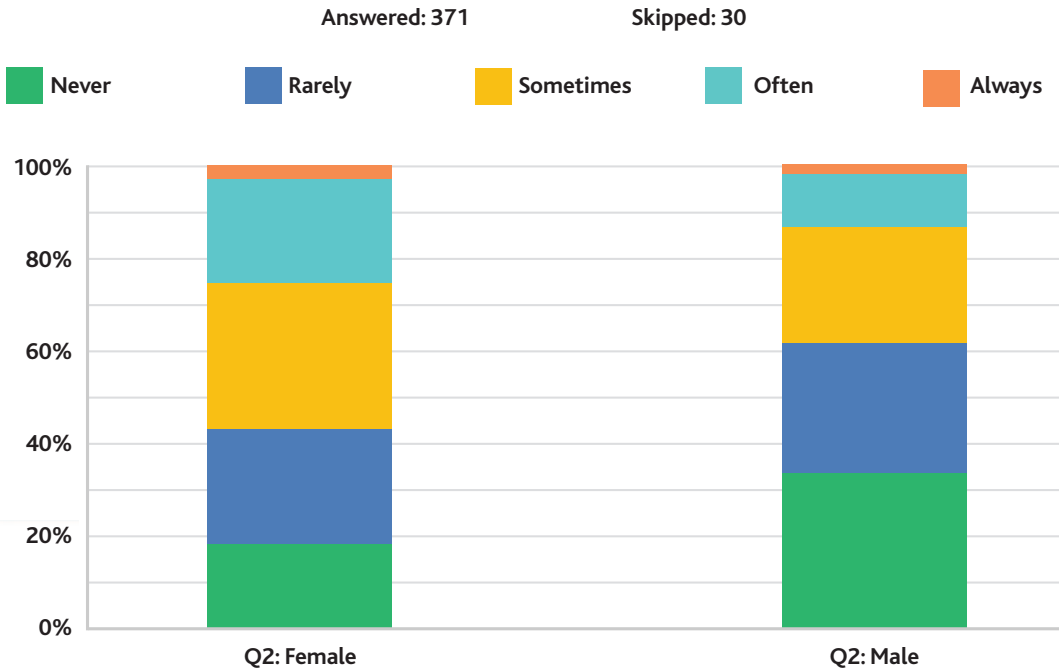
As another put it, 'there is a difference between a boss and a leader' and many commented on the lack of 'leadership by example'. Improved training is needed, explained another:

*"I am ex-military and have been extensively trained in all manner of leadership and command disciplines and protocols. From what I have seen in 10 years in yachting this is very much missing from senior crew and there is nowhere to study/practice/be taught this valuable skill. It is also not a requirement yet. HELM [a training programme] is starting to address it but has a hell of a long way to go to become effective."*

As a further respondent said, poor leadership often means that inevitable problems that arise on onboard are blamed on individuals who are then 'treated as the problem... Junior crew put up with a lot because it is so hard to get a job sometimes'.

- 45% of respondents said they had suffered from social isolation or loneliness 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' while working onboard yachts. This equated to 57% of women and 39% of men and to 29% of captains.

### Have you ever suffered from social isolation or loneliness during your contract?



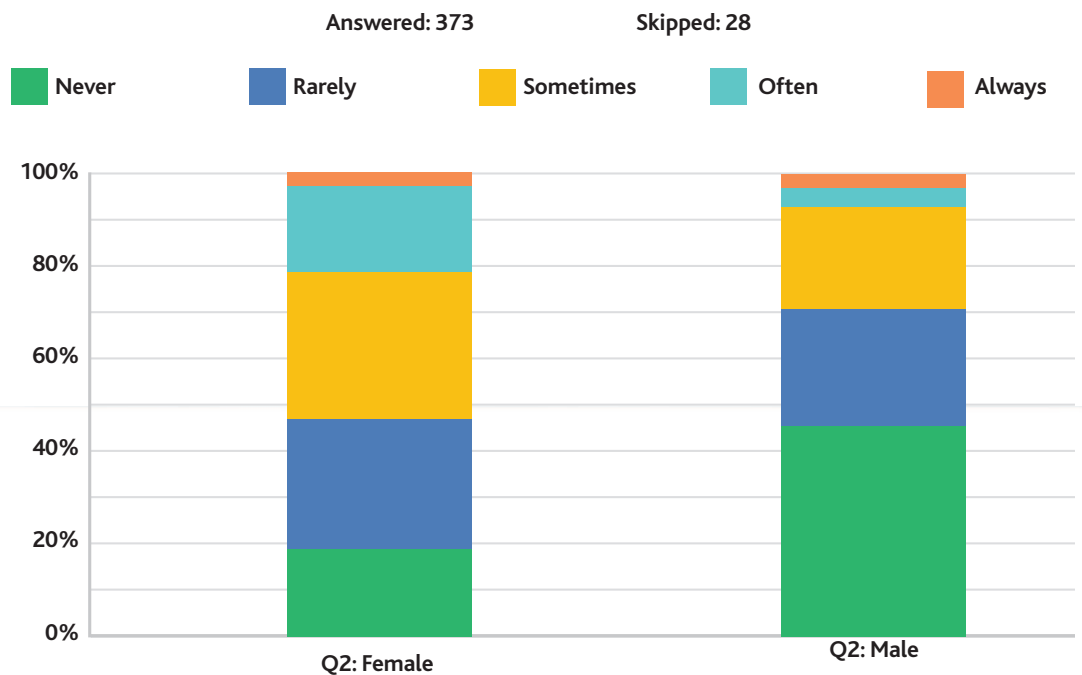
Respondents linked their experiences to a range of factors. To quote one example:

*“I was the only woman and non-drinker on a 40m m/y, it got tough sometimes. Plus the majority of crew were a different nationality which, although never a problem, can add to the loneliness feeling.”*

Others offered further factors that contribute to loneliness or social isolation: being a small crew; being away from family, especially during holiday seasons; poor internet; lack of support from senior crew; instances of bullying or being 'left out'; not wanting to join in with drug use; having a faith not shared by others; stress causing withdrawal; night watches; language barriers in port; being isolated in shipyards. Those who sailed with partners felt they were lucky (but some also noted that working together puts pressure on a relationship).

- Respondents were also asked whether they had suffered discrimination, harassment or bullying from owner/crew/guests and again the responses of men and women vary: 20% of women said they had experienced this 'often' or 'always', compared to 8% of men (or 13% of the two combined) – most commonly from captains or other senior crew – which prohibits seeking redress up the chain of command.

### Have you ever suffered discrimination, harassment or bullying from owner/crew/guests?



These figures are comparable to the SIRC/PYA (2010) research, which reports that 11% of respondents had experienced discrimination and 10% bullying and harassment, 'often', 'very often' or 'always'. As with our research, women reported a higher incident of harassment and discrimination than men. Our research also found 5% of the captains to have experienced discrimination, harassment or bullying 'often' or 'always'; a similar percentage was found for other senior ranks.



Survey comments, interview and diary data suggest that sexism and racism is commonplace in yachting, much of it appearing as banter. Examples of comments follow:

*“There is certainly age discrimination. My CV does not have my age... It doesn't matter if you look young for your age, if you can keep up with the youngsters or even outpace them – if you're too old, you're too old. For captains in particular there are a lot of jobs now where they're not looking for the experienced captains...they're looking for younger captains...because they're easier to get to do what you want them to do.”*

*“Being a girl working on deck. There was often a lot of discrimination when it comes to seeking work. Now it is a lot better than seven years ago, however there is still a gender gap for females in the deck and engineering departments. The industry wants to look like it has fully shifted but it is still progressing, slowly. This is often reflected in lower pay, more boring jobs – less exciting itineraries/programs.”*

*“There is a huge component on how the girls look. The guys too, to some degree. You have to be slim; they want to know your uniform size. There was even an electronic technical engineer I wanted to hire who really knew his stuff but the owner of the management company said no because he was a bit chubby. That's terrible in my eyes but it's private yachts, so very hard to regulate.”*

*“Sexual harassment from owners towards the female crew in my experience has been often and I myself have experienced it from owners and captains and been put in awkward/inappropriate situations and then been at a crossroads between losing your job (that you've struggled to get in the first place) or just having to put that issue aside and move on.”*

*“I have had to go on leave due to serious sexual harassment.”*

*“Sexual harassment from guests which is covered up and made to look playful. Bullying from an owner: owners can be quite 'special' and seem to think they can treat anyone as they wish. I was bullied and harassed by a chef for six months because I wasn't interested in him sexually. He was jealous and didn't seem to know another way to deal with that emotion. He also bullied another girl because she wouldn't sleep with him. The captain wasn't experienced enough to deal with the situation properly and wanted to remain buddies with the chef to maintain some kind of 'cool' status. The management company said “sorry to hear of your experience” and nothing was done.”*

*“In other industries, if there's sexual harassment, something generally happens if you complain. But in yachting, nothing happens. Yachting is wild – there are no laws – they'll chew you up and spit you out – it can be harsh.”*

*“She was a 19 year-old I'd trained with. The captain's girlfriend was the chief steward who was a complete bitch and gave her a terrible time. She quit and the captain lost the plot and dumped her at night on a beach in St Tropez! She was calling us in tears but we were far away – we couldn't help. She didn't know what to do. Eventually a guy who ran this little bar on the beach took her in for the night.”*

*“This is the most brutal industry I've worked in, in terms of how people treat each other. [When I worked in] the operating theatre, it was never this bad – nor in the Navy.”*

*“South Africans sometimes have trouble and often don't get hired because of visa issues. 'South Africans need not apply' – you see that quite often in ads. You can be as racist and sexist as you like in this industry.”*



*“Racism, for sure. The Filipino crew get paid less and often their food allowance is less as well. There was a smart, educated day worker in South Africa – he was black – with a great attitude, great at his job. I would have hired him in a jiffy. But the captain wouldn’t, not because the boss would have objected but because the management company would say no. Just as they management company had said no to certain nationalities on other occasions as well. I’ve only met a few black people in this industry and I think that’s really sad; it’s a lot harder for them to get jobs.”*

### Hours and patterns of work

Approximately 60 out of 402 respondents skipped this section.

- When asked whether they felt rested whilst in port, 67% of all respondents and 55% of captains replied ‘usually’ or ‘always’. This fell to 35% of all respondents and 79% of captains whilst at sea.

The charts below suggest crew onboard yachts over 100m are particularly

lacking rest in port but the numbers of respondents are not statistically significant. What can be observed more generally, is that crew working on smaller yachts with fewer colleagues are less rested than those onboard larger yachts with larger crew.

The main factor affecting rest was – predictably – working hours, followed by noise (often alcohol related), problems with beds/cabins, weather and stress. Survey/diary study comments included:

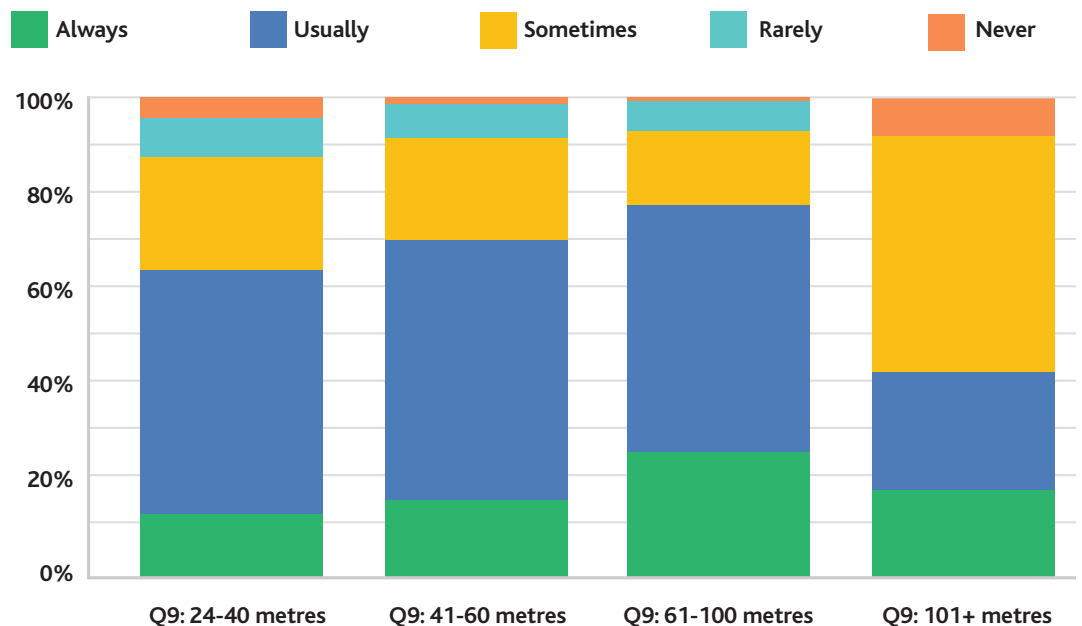
*“Free time is limited and pretty much non-existent onboard. You can’t hide – if you’re there you get used.”*

*“During the season we live off stress hormones. Maybe not every day but at least every other day, we need to be able to eat proper, nutritious food at a normal pace. We need to not end up with just four hours sleep. There maybe not time for proper exercise but there should at least be time for a walk. Something that allows one’s body chemistry to be happy, or at least, happier.”*

### Do you feel sufficiently rested whilst in port?

Answered: 340

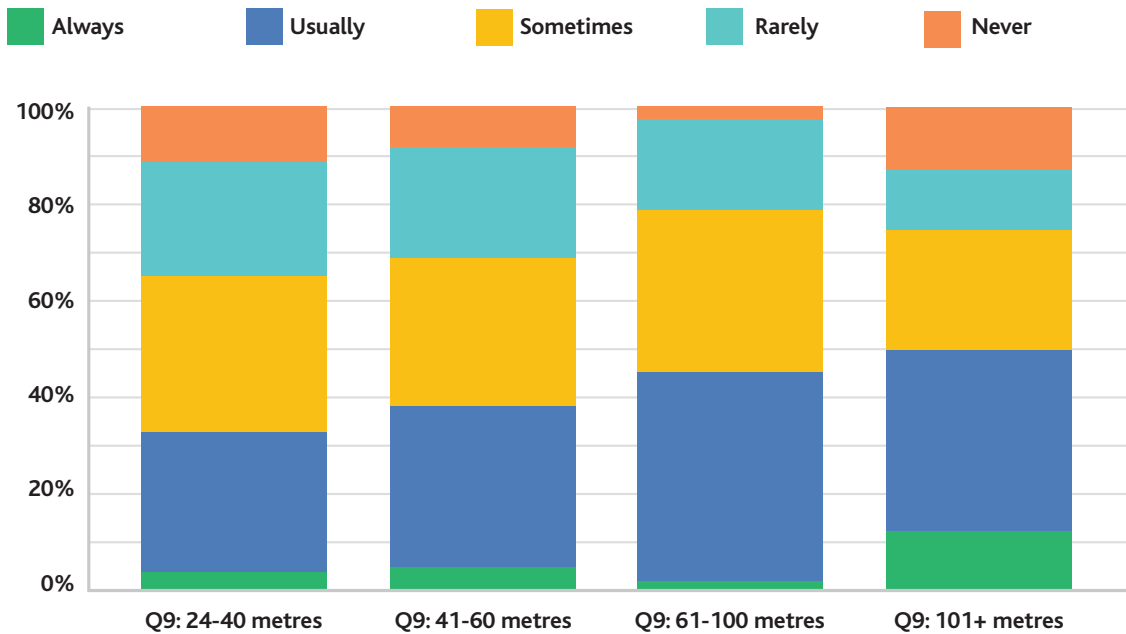
Skipped: 59



## Do you feel sufficiently rested whilst at sea?

Answered: 339

Skipped: 60

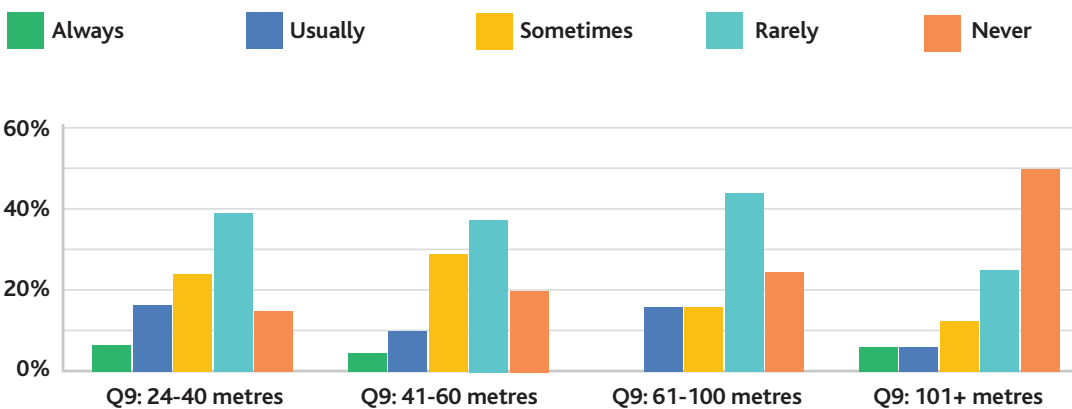


- Unsurprisingly, whether or not guests were onboard influenced crew’s ability to get ashore. 17% of all respondents and 29% of captains said they could ‘usually’ or ‘always’ get ashore when guests were present. This rose to 85% of all respondents and 95% of captains when guests were not onboard. Crew working aboard the largest yachts appeared most constrained, which again is likely be a factor of sample size.

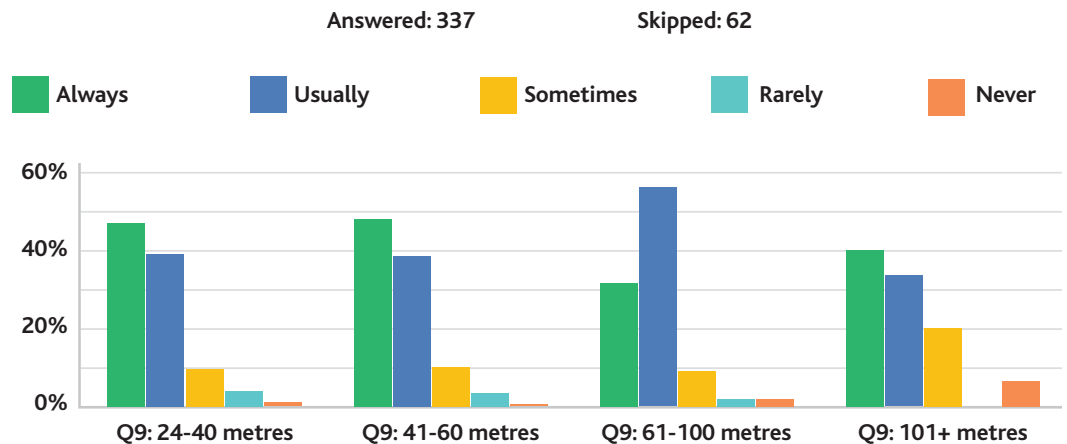
## Are you able to get on shore when guests are onboard?

Answered: 340

Skipped: 59



## Are you able to get ashore when guests aren't onboard?



- 51% of respondents were satisfied with their leave entitlement; 49% were not.

Comments suggested that leave entitlement varies from approximately 30-60 days per annum – with one respondent saying they had no leave entitlement at all – and another saying they had not had a day off for 50 days. Several commented on their leave entitlement not being enough, given the typically long working weeks and many wanted rotation, especially those with children. One explained the importance of having enough leave for two trips – one to see family and one to do something ‘for yourself’ – which he felt helped retain crew longer-term. Many also emphasised that the issue was less the amount of entitlement but rather whether one was actually able to take it, which often appeared to come down to the captain’s discretion. To quote from an interview:

*“With leave, they won’t let you cash it in at the end – you have to use it – but then you’re not allowed to take more than two days at a time. It really comes down to the captain. To be fair, mine didn’t understand my contract. I asked him if he’d actually read it when I was planning time to see my sons. I’ll have four days of leave by then, I said, because I get two days*

*a month – as well as a day in lieu if you work a weekend – but the captain didn’t realise. He checked with the owner who said I was right. He was good; he made sure we were alongside when we had a gap in charters so that I could go. That was nice of him.”*

One respondent commented that leave should not be conflated with training or study. Another described in an interview how she considered herself fortunate because the owner of her current boat pays for the crew to take a course of their choice each year, the time being additional to their leave entitlement:

*“We can choose anything, as long as it somehow relates to the boat – like learning a language – especially German or Polish. If it’s a very long course, like with the engineer, then he won’t get full pay during it. But the training is paid for and we get the time on top of our leave. So I’m very happy!”*

- 83% of respondents were satisfied with the degree of variation in their role; 17% were not. 91% of men were satisfied compared to 71% of women – presumably because more female than male respondents were employed in lower ranking positions, with less variation and choice in the tasks they undertake.

Some commented that they had too much variation in their role already ('anymore and it'll kill me' said one captain). 'As a sole stew in a 156' I do EVERYTHING so actually the variety is too much', said another. Others indicated that they would welcome more variation. Two comments from captains made it clear that a choice must be earned:

*"Your results are going to say that the juniors want more variation. Well, if they study, prove reliable and stick with it they will get it."*

*"This [question] could be misleading to a new member to the industry, as they will not have any say into the variety of tasks given to them. And for sure they will not like all of them."*

- 75% of respondents were 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never' able to plan shore-based appointments and activities sufficiently in advance because of yachts' unpredictable itineraries.

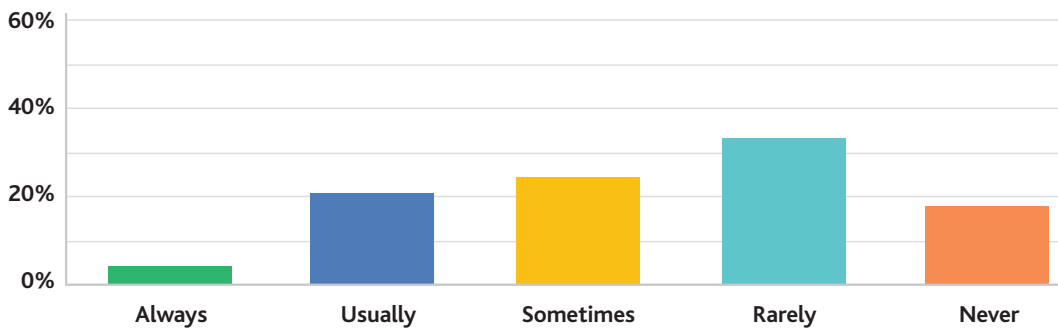
Comments indicated that planning, booking flights, etc. was always last-minute, that guests and owners' plans come first and this was understood as being an unavoidable part of yachting. To quote one interviewee:

*"There was one time when I was all set to go to a wedding and I had to cancel at the last minute because the owners changed their plans. We all had to forgo holidays, flights, trips home. There's no recompense – it's understood that that's a risk we face."*

### Does your yacht's itinerary enable you to plan shore-based appointments and activities sufficiently in advance?

Answered: 341

Skipped: 61

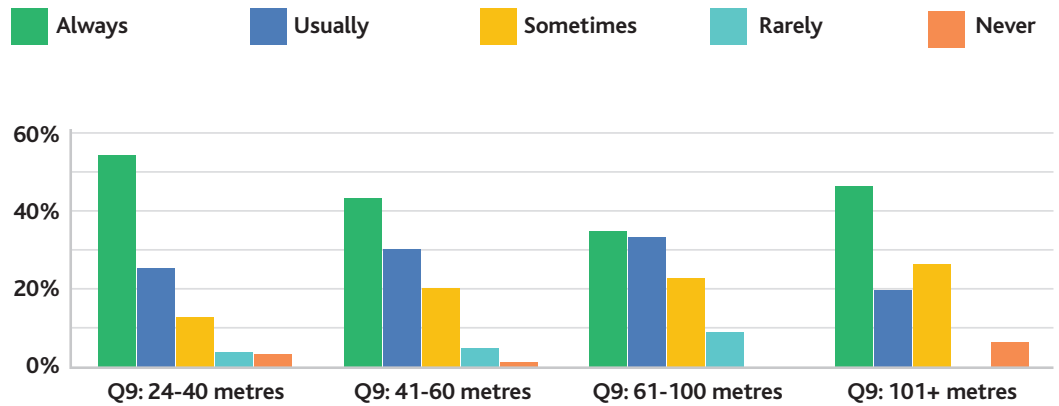


- 75% of respondents 'often' or 'always' worked more than contracted hours and this seems to be more of an issue the smaller the yacht/crew.<sup>7</sup> Only 5% of respondents received overtime pay.

### Do you work longer than your contracted hours?

Answered: 331

Skipped: 68



Some commented that they lacked a contract altogether (see 'terms of employment' section for further insights) and many said that they had no contracted hours. Those on chartered yachts were aware of MLC limits (see Standard A2.3)<sup>8</sup> on working hours but also acknowledged that recording fewer hours than actually worked, in order to comply with regulation on paper, was widespread practice. One said they had worked 120 hour a week a few times but tended to average 80-90 hours per week when guests are onboard. Another said they routinely worked 16-18 hour days. Several comments said that overtime during busy periods should be given in lieu once guests have left but rarely is. At the same time, the majority of respondents accepted that long hours

went with the territory and for many, especially the more experienced, this was a point of pride. The first two of the following comments were made by captains:

*"[I work more than contracted hours] as should anyone in this industry!! if you don't like to work then go find somewhere else to loaf."*

*"I'm a yachtie and nothing is more important to me than the care of the owner, the yacht and my crew."*

*"We work to serve the guests not the other way around. Yachting has extreme pros and cons, more than most jobs. If you do not like it, leave. It is not the Navy."*

7. However, one advantage of working onboard smaller yachts with smaller crew is that crew gain greater all-round experience. See 'How smaller yachts could lead to big careers', Lulu Trask, Superyacht News, 11 August 2017: <http://www.superyachtnews.com/crew/smaller-yachts-big-careers>

8. Which stipulates that the maximum hours of work should not exceed 14 hours in any 24-hour period and 72 hours in any seven-day period. Or, at least 10 hours of rest in any 24-hour period and 77 hours in any seven-day period. The daily hours of rest may not be divided into more than two periods, and at least six hours of rest should be given consecutively in one of those two periods.

## Facilities and support

Respondents were asked about the main activities and facilities they want to access when in port. 107 out of 402 respondents skipped this question.

The most frequently arising words from the responses are shown below. By far the most popular responses related to exercise: 'gym' was cited most often but other opportunities to enjoy team or solitary sport and exercise also featured regularly, such as swimming, yoga, running, walking, hiking, team sports, adventure sports, etc. Often these comments also indicated a desire to be in nature and a quiet environment. Many respondents said that accessing bars and restaurants was their priority, along with shops –

primarily for groceries and toiletries – and places where crew could have a massage or their hair or nails done. Other port facilities/services that crew wanted to access included: WiFi, bus or other transportation including car rental, medical or counselling services, cinema and other forms of entertainment, 'non-alcoholic' spaces for socialising, dry cleaning, visa/documentation services, local information and opportunities to experience other cultures and to explore new places. Many added that they wanted these services to be good quality, affordable and safe. One cited Rybovich Marina in West Palm Beach as an example of a yacht port offering a good range of facilities and services.

Running Movie Relax Pub Internet Health Care Crew Church Shops  
Social **Bar** Access **Gym** Fitness **Restaurants** Food  
Walk Seeing **Sport** Family **Exercise** Safe Place **Yoga** Massage **Port**

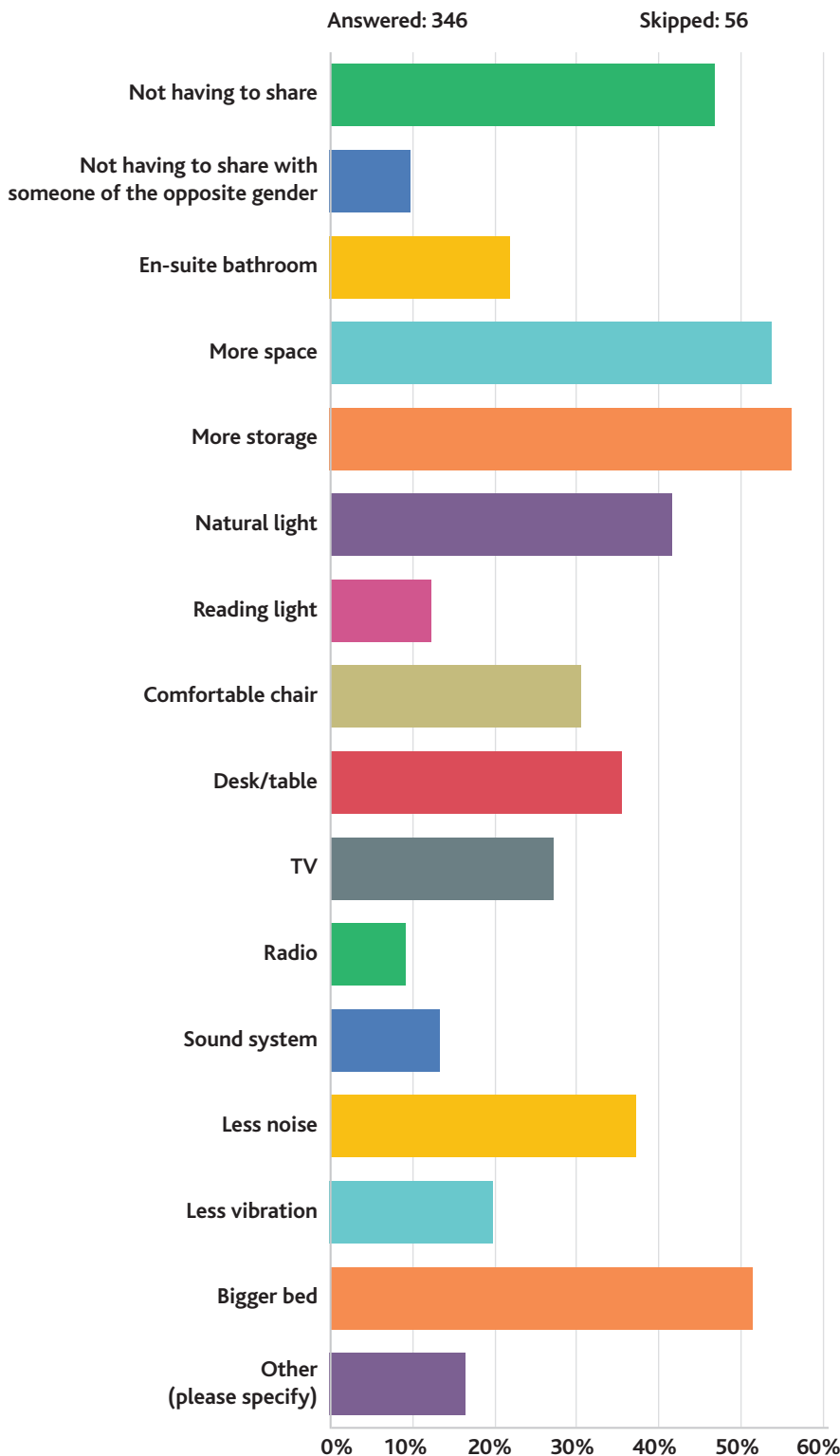


Respondents were also invited to indicate how their cabins and other areas and access to facilities onboard could be improved, if at all, including communications such as internet provision. Approximately 80 out of 402 respondents skipped each of these three questions, which might indicate that no

improvements were needed or wanted, as was reflected in an average of 15 of the comments relating to each question.

- 'More storage', 'more space', 'a bigger bed' and 'not having to share' were the most frequently selected improvements to cabins.

### Which of the following would improve your cabin? Tick all that apply



Some comments acknowledged the inherent constraints of ship design. For example:

*“All of the above but the question is irrelevant. Crew quarters are normally below standard in an ideal world because of space and costs.”*

*“This size boat does not allow it, but to not have my cabin located next to the crew mess. Would like privacy behind pilothouse so I could walk out and not see crew each time I want to come and go from my cabin. Or crew listening to my movements, the shower, the toilet or trying to hear my conversations. Privacy as the captain would be great.”*

One respondent took issue with the status quo:

*“After building yachts to now being an officer, I find it appalling that guests spaces are maximised and crew spaces are minimised. End of the day the happier the crew are the better they will perform for you, respect you and be loyal to you!”*

Others' comments supported this sentiment:

*“The crew are the bread and butter of what makes a program good or bad; that and the living quarters, its vital that crew areas are fairly proportioned for which this vessel lacks, but I will figure a way of getting around this during the winter months without guest usage!”*

*“When people are feeling limited in their personal space, they get narky, things get heater, things get said and I am completely convinced that with more personal space, all these things are avoided.”*

Other improvements to cabins suggested in the comments were, in order of frequency:

- More space around and above the bed. To quote one respondent: 'More head space so that crew don't get back and neck problems from being in bed. They don't have other places to sit on the boat, so watch TV in bed and then get strained backs and necks.'
- Improved mattress (more comfortable, cleaner).
- Improved air conditioning (better maintained, more effective, not angled directly onto head).
- Privacy blind/curtains when sleeping.
- (More reliable) WiFi in cabin.
- Natural air.
- Being above the waterline.
- Plants.
- Ladder to access the upper bunk.
- Ability to personalise cabin.
- An entertainment system that works.
- Not sleeping in an office space.



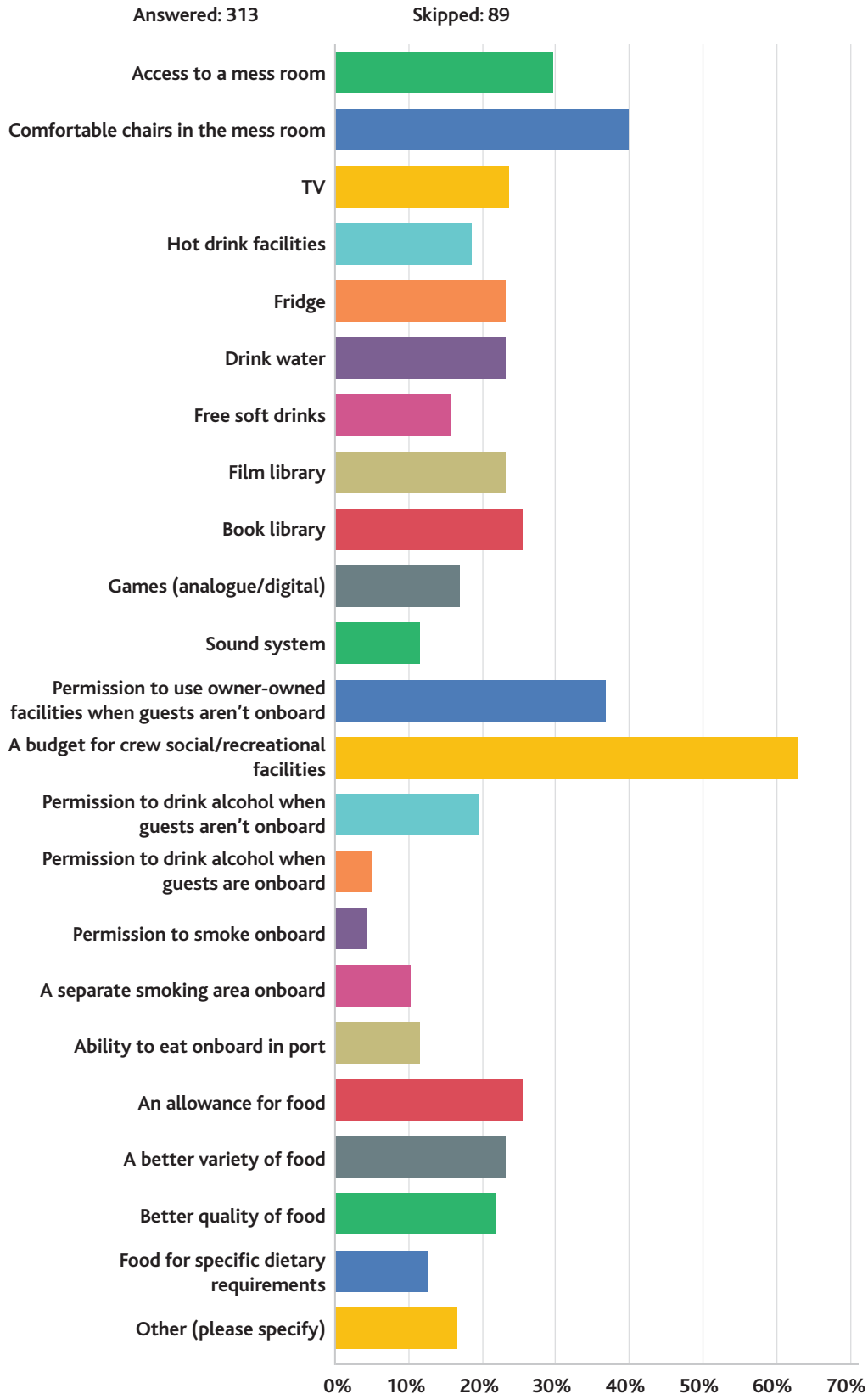


Responses to the question of how crew’s experience onboard, outside of cabins, can be improved are shown below. A budget for crew social/recreational activities was strikingly the most popular choice, selected by 63% of respondents.

To quote one comment:

*“I think most of these [other options] are all available anyway but to boost crew morale and keep the longevity of crew it’s imperative to do group activities. A budget for this would be a game changer.”*

**Which of the following would improve your experience onboard, out of your cabin? Tick all that apply.**



Other improvements to spaces and facilities outside of cabins suggested in the comments were, in order of frequency:

- Gym access/improvements.
- An outdoor and/or quiet recreation space – with a couch/sofa. One captain observed that 'in the past, the foredeck was a space where crew could relax outdoors. Now this is precluded as designers have it overlooked by guests and often designate it as an owners' space.'
- Bigger crew mess.

Food – which 22% of respondents felt needed improving – provoked a mix of comments and surprisingly seems to vary in quality between yachts considerably. To quote a diary study participant:

*"Food is one of the biggest affectors of morale – in terms of both nutrition and enjoyment – having something to look forward to – and I've experienced both ends of the spectrum. Some crew spend their own money in restaurants the whole time because the food is awful – lazy chefs with no healthy focus – it's amazing they got a job on a yacht at all. Everyone's morale and energy levels*

*suffer and it's terrible. And I understand that not everyone is top of their game everyday. I've also seen chefs who put some love into it – they want it to be varied, they want it to be healthy. They'll adjust the food according to the weather and the demands of the day. They'll occasionally bake cookies as a treat or a cake for someone's birthday – it makes such a massive difference. There was one time I was on a boat for just three days and flew myself home at my own expense because the only 'vegetable' I saw in that time was fries. That's not for me."*

What respondents did agree on was the limited choice of food, as this interview extract explains:

*"The food is amazing. You can't expect to be vegan or have to much say – we're on a boat after all – but mostly we get what's left from the guests. More of a problem is finding time to eat. Or even to go to the loo, to be frank! Kids going into this thinking they're going to be princesses have another thing coming!"*

This contrasts with the SIRC/PYA (2010) research that found 92% of respondents felt there to be a good variety of food onboard.

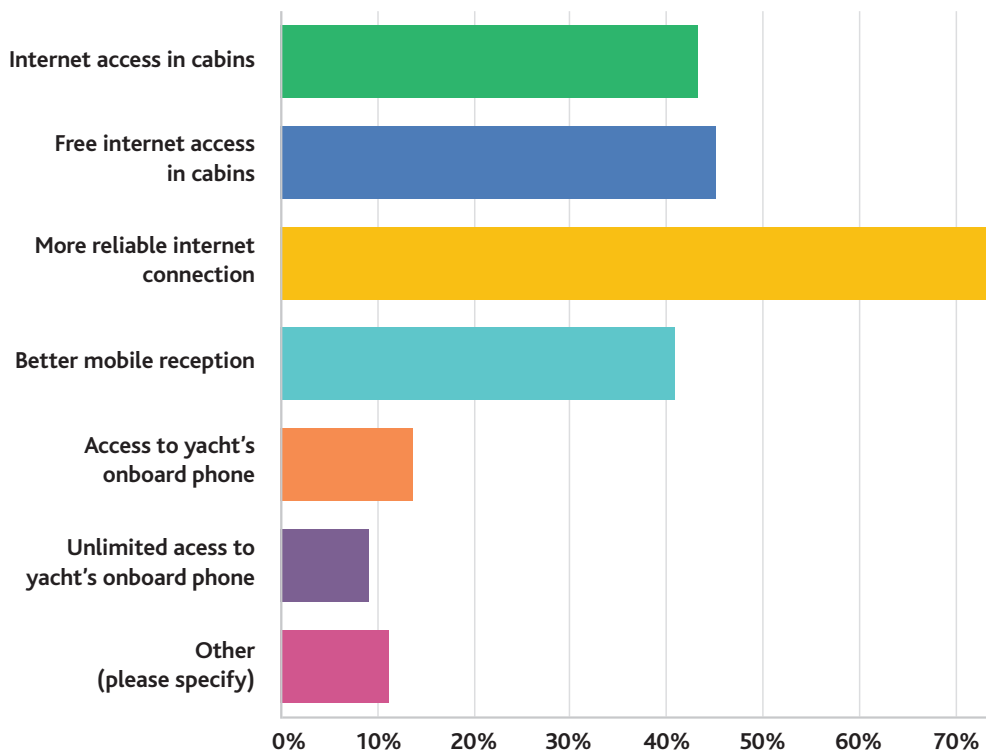


- In response to the question about how communications provision onboard could be improved, 74% selected 'more reliable internet connection'.

**Which of the following would improve communications provision onboard? Tick all that apply.**

Answered: 303

Skipped: 99



An interviewee described how 'yachtie Facebook pages being are full of people asking about which data plan to get in France – the boats' WiFi often isn't all that good'. Two survey respondents commented that lifting limits on WiFi would make a huge difference and another said that she would welcome being able to send and receive parcels. In an interview, a further respondent spoke of not being allowed to use WiFi when guests were onboard: 'I didn't have data there in Saudi so for the first five days I couldn't even let my mother know that I'd arrived safely.'

Interviews and diary studies confirmed that WhatsApp is widely used by crew, often in low-data usage mode. One captain suggested that in locations where crew are unable to access 4G

mobile networks (or lack an affordable data plan) and also can't access sufficient and reliable yacht internet connection, then 'unlimited access to the onboard phone (except when guest are using it) as a standard monthly payment...would benefit the crew tremendously'.

Comments revealed a split in opinion as to whether improved internet access was needed or desirable. One said, 'I think good reliable free internet access is a must in today's world. With this TV, radio, access to social media and communication to family and friends is possible and expected by the young people today.' A captain felt that 'we have better morale when people aren't on their phone or internet!'

Another (non-captain) wrote that:

*“Internet is a privilege, not a given right. People should learn to manage without it from time to time. I get constant bitching and moaning about the VSAT connection onboard during crossings (no 4G connection available). My response is ‘please feel free to speak to the owner and ask him to upgrade the speed especially for you.’ I have no time for people [who] that think fast internet and unlimited use of the SAT phone is a God-given right, they should move along out of this industry.”*

This latter quote echoes a sentiment coming through in some of the comments relating to all three questions about improvements to facilities. In response to the question about improvements to cabins, one captain wrote: *“stupid question to ask crew in the hospitality industry, shame on you.”*

Another captain responded to the question about improvements outside of cabins with this comment: *“crew are becoming spoiled and requests from crew are starting to look like requests from owners.”*

A more measured response to the same question was made by another (non-captain) respondent:

*“Yes in an ideal world but reality has to come into check here. Someone has to pay for this and the more demands asked for means the owner will just hire from a social/ethnic class that don’t demand. ie. The owner will hire from Asia, Central Africa or Central America if Europeans, North Americans and Australians/New Zealanders demand the world.”*

## Terms of employment

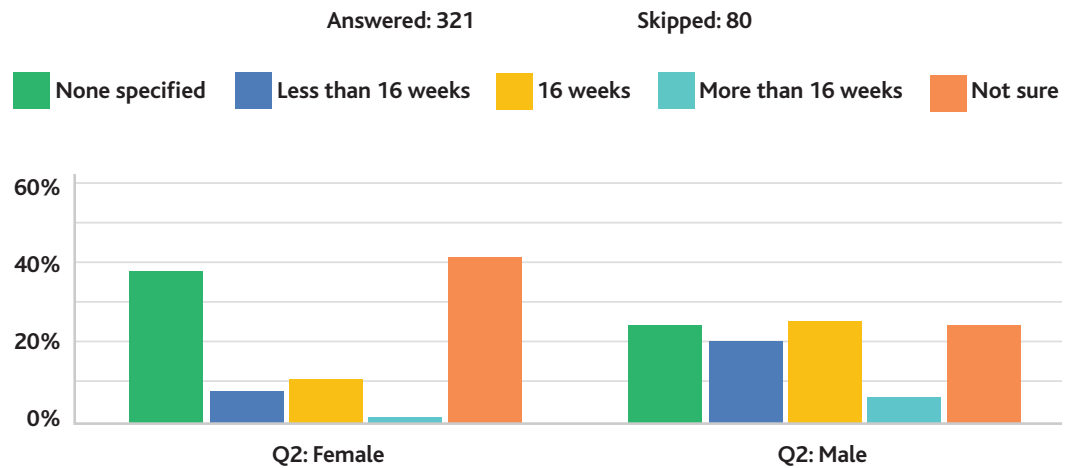
Approximately 80 out of 402 respondents skipped this section.

- 79% of crew responding to the survey were on permanent contracts. 21% were on fixed-term contracts.
- 25% of respondents were confident that their contracts stipulated at least 16 weeks of paid sick-leave entitlement.

The MLC stipulates a minimum of 16 weeks of paid sick leave for seafarers onboard commercially registered vessels (MLC Standard A4.2.1), which does not cover crew working onboard private yachts. Although respondents were not asked to stipulate if their yacht was private or chartered, the survey data suggests few (5%) crew members were eligible for more than 16 weeks’ sick pay (although the figure might be higher, given that 30% of respondents were unsure about their entitlement). Interestingly, women appear to fare worse than men when it comes to sick pay entitlement. 13% of female respondents were entitled to 16 weeks or more, compared to 32% of men – perhaps suggesting that captains – who are almost all male and represent a third of respondents – receive more favourable contractual terms and indeed 40% of captains were confident that their contracts stipulated at least 16 weeks of paid sick-leave entitlement.

(The SIRC/PYA (2010) research reported 53% of respondents to be entitled to sick pay – but the duration is not specified.)

## What is your sick pay entitlement under your contract of employment?



- Respondents were also asked whether their (current or more recent) employer provided additional insurance to cover the cost of their respondents' salary should they remain sick for longer than the period specified in their contract of employment. To this, 22% said 'yes', 38% said 'no' and 39% were unsure. (Yachting is not suited to high-street policies that will not cover work-related claims and extended-periods of time abroad.)

28% of captains had this additional insurance provided, 50% did not and 23% were unsure – which goes against the above suggestion that captains receive a more favourable employment package.

The challenge for insurance providers, according to an industry employee, is that incapacitated crew are often fired and so have little incentive for being deemed fit to work.

- A further question asked whether crew enjoyed any separate protection in respect of medical expenses or sick pay, such as that provided by a home-country social system (often requiring voluntary contributions) or individual insurance policy. Approximately half of those with additional insurance for sick pay from their employers also had this – as did 35% of all respondents to this question (approximately half of which referred to national healthcare

systems and half to private schemes that crew paid for themselves). 48% of respondents lacked this protection and 17% were unsure whether they had it or not.

- 19% of all respondents and 30% of captains made – and/or received from their employer – payments towards a (public or private) pension scheme, whereas 77% did not (and 4% were unsure). (This compares to 94% of respondents not having private contributions from employers in the SIRC/PYA (2010) research.)
- 8% of respondents were confident that they were entitled to paid/unpaid maternity/paternity leave. 65% had no such entitlement and 26% were unsure whether they did.

Respondents comments included, 'want to become a parent? Leave yachting – simple as that' (made by a captain); 'I don't think this exists in yachting' and 'it's not in the contract but the captain is a fair guy' – all of which indicates the mismatch between employees' rights and expectations in this versus other sectors and the extent to which the captain's discretion determines crew members' working and wider lives. One respondent shared how she has: 'Just left my job at 24 weeks pregnant with no maternity benefits. I am...having to set up businesses at home and prepare for a baby. It is slightly stressful.'

- 26% of respondents were confident that they were entitled to paid compassionate leave, 17% to unpaid compassionate leave, 34% said they had no such entitlement and 23% were unsure.

More than half of the comments relating to this question referred to only the first few days being paid and/or compassionate leave being at the discretion of the captain. One captain felt particularly strongly that compassionate leave was not a contractual matter: *"It's not in the contract and nor should it be. Who decides if the death is close enough to you to warrant it?? It's all at the captain's discretion..."*

It is worth noting that women respondents were far more likely to select 'unsure' in response to the six questions above, which might suggest that women engaged less with terms of their contract or simply that they were more comfortable confessing doubt.

- Respondents were asked whether they had to sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) and whether this negatively affects their wellbeing or the reporting of issues. Of the 61% of respondents who have been required to sign NDAs, only 9% felt this to be problematic. The comments provide no further insights other than one remark from a captain about security: *"NDAs are very important as we have so many young crew who are too immature to understand ship security."*

A sense of the arbitrariness of contracts emerges in respondents' additional 61 comments about their contracts: contracts are described as 'symbolic', 'often broken' and whether or not their terms are adhered to often relies upon the captain's discretion. In the words of one respondent, 'the terms are fine but carrying them out is another matter.' Two had no written contract at all: one, now a captain, felt it was too late to request one after years, without losing face. A further two respondents



reported problems with withheld or late pay, which according to a representative from Nautilus is one of the main issues reported to the union, along with unfair dismissal and questions about leave entitlement.

While relatively few superyacht crew members make use of SeafarerHelp (ISWAN's helpline for seafarers), those that do tend also to report problems with pay or unfair dismissal: one caller's salary was withheld after they resigned when on leave, another was chasing their final month's salary, a third's entire crew was awaiting 16 months' salary following the sale of their yacht and a fourth had been fired while on leave and was struggling to access the possessions they had left onboard. One survey respondent commented that severance pay should exist in yachting, independent of paid annual leave. A further respondent had heard that the UK's Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) regulations allow 'a crew member to be fired on the spot...

This is not obvious in standard crew contracts (but should be), as crew generally don't read the whole MCA guidelines.<sup>9</sup> Other survey comments about contracts included:

*"You have to read contracts carefully. The terms can be ok but then they put in these clauses about being subject to the requirements of chartering."*

*"The culture is, here is your contract and sign it as is or we will not employ you' and 'It very much feels that the contract is cleverly worded to benefit the management company and not the crew member. No value for the worker. No appreciation of loyalty or longevity."*

*"Some contracts include a clause about consenting to listening devices in communal crew areas, which not everyone will have read. And there's also a clause about having to return an annual bonus if you leave within the next seven months, which crew feel to be unfair."*

9. See section 6 of MGN 477(M): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mgn-477m-maritime-labour-convention-2006-seafarers-employment-agreements>. While not quite 'firing on the spot', seafarers agree to a seven-day notice period. The notice period must be clear in the Seafarer Employment Agreement and the shipowner's notice period can be no shorter than the seafarer's notice period.



## Conclusions

*“Yachting delivers beautiful adventures to remote parts of the world – if you are so lucky with the program entailed – at a fraction of a cost that any other occupation can offer. It allows me to grasp particular set of skills, safely navigating these floating palaces and berthing them in tight, front house slips to learning varnishing and paint projects, teamship and logistics. The norm is six weeks holiday, twice as much as America offers its honorable citizens and you are even enrolled onto the ship’s insurance at no added costs.”*

This endorsement of yachting from one diary study participant is indicative of a general sense emerging from the research that yachting, in spite of its challenges, offers opportunities that few other, if any, lines of work provide and that ‘yachties’ are impressively resourceful and resilient employees. At the same time, it is notable that having sung yachting’s praises in one breath, all bar two interviewees and diary study participants went on to say that they were soon to leave yachting, citing its various challenges and necessary sacrifices as justification – something that also came through in the survey comments. To quote a selection of interviewees:

*“You’re really connected, you get to know each other really quickly – you have friends all over the world and in every port you’re seeing if you recognise the boats to see if you might know anyone. You get to travel, to be at sea and to be outside. But you sacrifice a lot too.”*

*“You have food made by professional chef. You drop off laundry in the morning, it’s there folded on your bunk at the end of your shift. Your toiletries are provided – you want a different brand of deodorant you just say and it’s there. But you work bloody long hours without a*

*day off in weeks during charters. Of course you’re made to fake rest logs. And there’s no option of being ill.”*

*“I don’t know how long I’ll last in the industry. I knew it would be all about money but I wasn’t quite prepared for how much that would be true – and there is so little respect for the marine environment. I don’t know how long I can stick it, on moral grounds.”*

*“It’s really fun, young, different nationalities, good food, training, spacious and modern cabins. I’ve had a bad experience but it’s a huge industry and I move on – it helps that I’m well qualified – so if I don’t like it, I resign. I’ll do two more years – I’d like to try charter for the last year because I’ve heard the tips are good but it’s hard work. Then I have plans back home.”*

One survey comment gave a neat summary of the research findings: ‘[yachting] is a work hard, play hard mentality. To get time to look after yourself you have to leave the boat.’ This ‘work-hard; play-hard’ culture is seen – especially by the senior ranks and ‘old-school’ – as a ‘survival of the fittest’ source of pride: ‘this is a fantastic industry for hard working people. If they don’t like the boat they are on or how it’s run, then leave.’ To quote another respondent:

*“I have worked in the industry for over 25 years and love it. However, at the age of 45 I am physically unable to complete an 18 hour day anymore. So I have saved my pennies and looking forward to my retirement in two years. I am old school and have had an absolute blast sailing around the world many times and have memories to keep me giggling in my wheelchair for decades to come. What to improve? Nothing as far as I’m concerned, nothing is perfect but whatever’s not perfect about yachting is bloody perfect for me.”*



Some of the comments included in this report, many made by captains, have communicated a keenness to defend the status quo and a resentment of research into welfare that was seen as pandering to a new generation, which comes in the context of increasing regulation. Clearly, one of the problems with this sentiment and accompanying culture is the high degree of crew turnover it produces, along with a 'race to the bottom' in which employment terms and conditions in a global labour market stagnate or fall. As two survey comments put it:

*"Crew welfare has not been taken seriously, as the mentality by the industry, owners and captains is, 'if you won't do it, we will find someone who will.' At the same point, there are far too many crew who are not here for the long run and are effectively undercutting and undermining the professionals in the industry. At the end of the day it comes back to the owners and the captain: what is the standard they want to set onboard? The ironic part is these owners spend millions purchasing a yacht and its 'toys', but are reluctant to 'invest' into the crew who are the ones directly responsible for looking after their pride and joy."*

*"We realise we are there to work for the owners but that doesn't mean we aren't entitled to some quality of life. I know a lot of yachts look after their crew but a lot don't. Sticking to contractual agreements and also showing loyalty to crew who have shown loyalty to you when things go wrong would be a huge step in the right direction!"*

Interestingly, many respondents – even those that had experienced the murkier side of yachting – had a degree of sympathy with the 'old school'. 'I think there has to be a middle ground', said one – 'between this denying of rights

and those cases of crew suing for millions for mistreatment. I can see it from both sides'. Some respondents felt that individual crew members taking more responsibility and also not overly pandering to demands, would help address some of the issues onboard (but of course this only goes so far). To quote an interviewee:

*"I think the main issue is a lack of responsibility – especially among young people. An Atlantic crossing, for example, is three weeks of absolute exhaustion – you don't then go out and get pissed – no wonder accidents happen. We also should push back more. I remember one time an owner's wife suddenly said she wanted 1,000 white roses by 5pm – and there we were in the middle of nowhere. The steward managed to get them airlifted from New York for something like £100,000, only for the wife to change her mind and send them back. We should push back and say no to that sort of thing."*

Affecting a game-changing shift in crew welfare on superyachts would involve a seismic shift in leadership, in employment terms and their implementation, in boat design and in culture – primarily in terms of enabling (paid) time for rest, recovery, medical appointments and acknowledging the mental and physical damage of constant long hours – removing the stigma around mental health and addressing discrimination, harassment and bullying. Increased media interest in yachting and wider societal shifts might help such changes gather pace. It is notable, for example, that the PYA's recent research into incidents of sexual harassment among its members was in response to the global #MeToo movement and a marked increase in the number of incidents of sexual harassment reported by PYA members.

## Recommendations

With the 'middle-ground' in mind, more immediate, step-change improvements to the welfare of superyacht crew might include:

### Incoming expectations and onward transitioning:

- Improving new recruits' knowledge of what to expect, as an add-on to initial STCW training, including practical guidance in understanding and negotiating contracts, visa requirements, etc. – in partnership with management companies.
- Improved industry support for crew transitioning out of the sector.

### Support and information:

- Raising awareness of avenues for support, such as ISWAN's free, 24/7, multilingual helpline SeafarerHelp, port welfare organisations/centres, the PYA and the union Nautilus. It was notable that several respondents made reference to the flag state – usually in the context of not providing the support that crew felt was needed – but none mentioned charities or unions as sources of support. Notably, union membership is growing – more new Nautilus members are from superyachts than any other sector – perhaps helped by two, high-profile cases in which the union has recently been involved<sup>10</sup> – although no crew asked during this research were members of a union or knew much about them ('there is one', said an interviewee 'but I think it's quite small and not many people know about it').
- Given that superyachts often use different ports or port areas compared to other (commercial) vessels, the feasibility of yacht crew making use of welfare organisations' centres and



services needs consideration but has potential to help address a range of needs identified in this report: the need for a generic social space ashore that is not a bar; the need for support with faith/spirituality (via port chaplains, reading material, prayer rooms, religious services, etc.); the need for access to fitness/sporting opportunities and resources; mental health support via trained welfare workers; access to libraries, internet, free transportation, advice about medical professionals and other local facilities, etc. There is also scope for yacht owners/management companies to contribute to the funding of these organisations.

- Widening distribution of health and welfare guidance and resources already available to the wider seafaring population, especially around mental health, including digital resources.

10. <https://www.nautilusint.org/en/news-insight/news/union-helps-superyacht-members-caught-up-in-divorce-dispute/>

<https://www.nautilusint.org/en/news-insight/news/new-sale-agreed-for-indian-empress-superyacht/>

**Patterns of work, leadership, terms of employment and grievance procedures:**

- Enabling more time for rest and relaxation, particularly between charters. More rest and/or time off were the two things that approximately a quarter of respondents cited when asked 'what one thing would most improve your experience onboard your current/last yacht?'.
  - More rotational positions, in which two crew members are employed per one role, enabling each to have an extended period of time at home while the other works onboard, which – as several respondents commented – begins to make it possible for yacht crew to maintain a family life. Rotation – along with improvements to leadership – were each offered by 13% of respondents when asked about the one thing that would improve their onboard experience, second only to improvements in rest and relaxation. The next most regularly cited improvements (totally 22% of responses) concerned colleagues and crew dynamics, more interesting and more advance information about itineraries, more personal space and improvements to cabins and improvements to management companies and/or the way they interact with crew and issues onboard.
  - Increased involvement and visibility of management companies onboard yachts and a review of grievance procedures to offer an alternative model not dependent on chain of command.
- Improvements to leadership via improved/expanded training and other initiatives.
- Employer involvement in the setting of good practice around employment terms and conditions, which might include severance pay and expanded health insurance provision not subject to a probationary period.
- Improvements to cabins: privacy blinds/curtains around beds, improved mattresses, etc – and a more effective system for flagging and having readily-addressed needs met (in cabins and communal areas).
- Improvements to crew facilities: most notably exercise/recreation spaces/equipment and opportunities, as well as a budget for crew activities that support cohesion and morale. Improved use of affordable technology to improve the level and reliability of internet connectivity.

**Further research:**

- Follow-up, in-depth exploration of a more limited number of key issues, building on this and the SIRC/PYA (2010) research – such as that the PYA has recently undertaken into sexual harassment on yachts – as well as issues not covered in this report, such as recruitment and training.



# SeafarerHelp

*The lifeline for seafarers*

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