

Evaluation of the Survey “Shore Leave for Seafarers in Covid-19”

Deutsche Seemannsmission Hamburg-Harburg e.V.

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Introduction

The following survey was conducted from 17 to 23 October 2022 in the Port of Hamburg, Germany. The methodology used was a written, structured questionnaire that was completed in the seaman’s club “Duckdalben” as well as on board ships in port. 207 seafarers (= n/ 100%) replied to a total 14 questions. No pre-test was conducted. 89 questionnaires were filled out during ship visits on board and 118 were completed in the seamen's club.

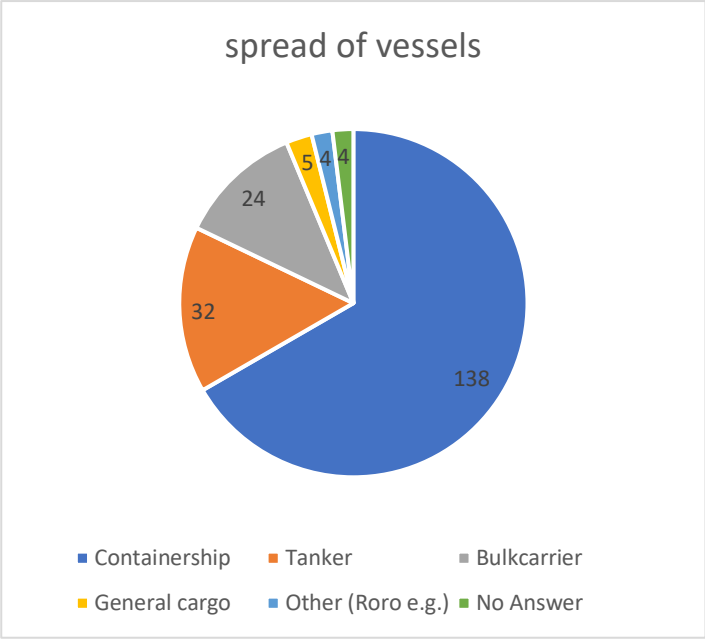
Survey Methodology

In order to obtain a broad spectrum of answers, and taking into account the fact that seafarers come from all cultures, faiths, continents and educational backgrounds, we decided to conduct qualitative and quantitative research by means of a written, structured questionnaire. The international background of crews on board merchant vessels was also the reason for the questionnaire being written in a simplified, easily understandable English.

The questionnaires were completed in the presence of seamen’s mission volunteers or staff members by seafarers who are currently working on a commercial vessel. We believe that information provided by these seafarers, gathered in an actual working environment, has a higher validity than answers to an online questionnaire completed in the comfort of their homes.

Question 1: Ship Type (Type of your vessel?)

Description: Answers to the first question show that more than half of the respondents live and work on a container ship (138/ 67%), which is a higher share of container vessels when compared to the world average. The other vessel groups are tankers (32/ 15%), bulk carriers (24/ 11%), general cargo (5/ 2%), and other (4/ 2%). No answer was provided by (4/ 2%).



Interpretation: The higher proportion of respondents on container vessels corresponds to the higher percentage of container vessels that visit Hamburg. This means that with regard to the survey results, container vessels are somewhat over-represented when compared to the world's fleet.

Question 2: Age Groups (How old are you?)

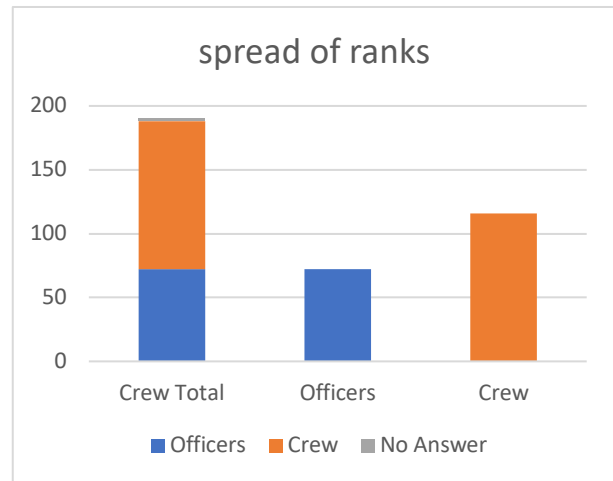
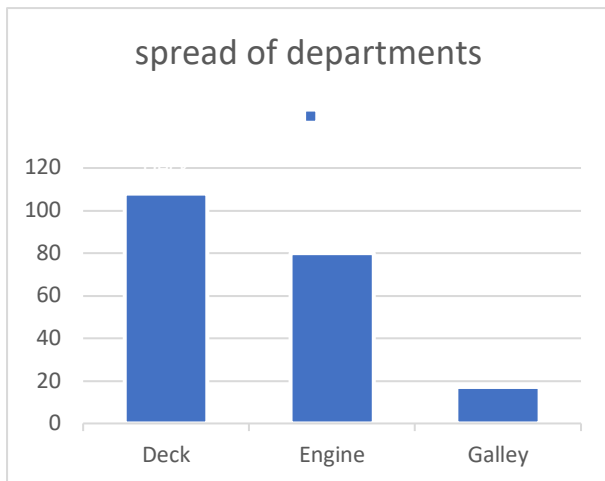
Description: The answers show that nearly two thirds (129/ 62%) of the seafarer respondents are older (age >30), followed by younger crewmembers aged 16-30 (72/ 35%).

Structure of Age Groups			
16-30 years	31-50 years	51+ years	No answer
72	116	13	6

Interpretation: Assuming that one doesn't normally start a maritime career later in life, this age structure enables us to infer that the respondent seafarers are both experienced and qualified enough to accurately reply to the respective questions.

Question 3: Rank (What is your rank?)

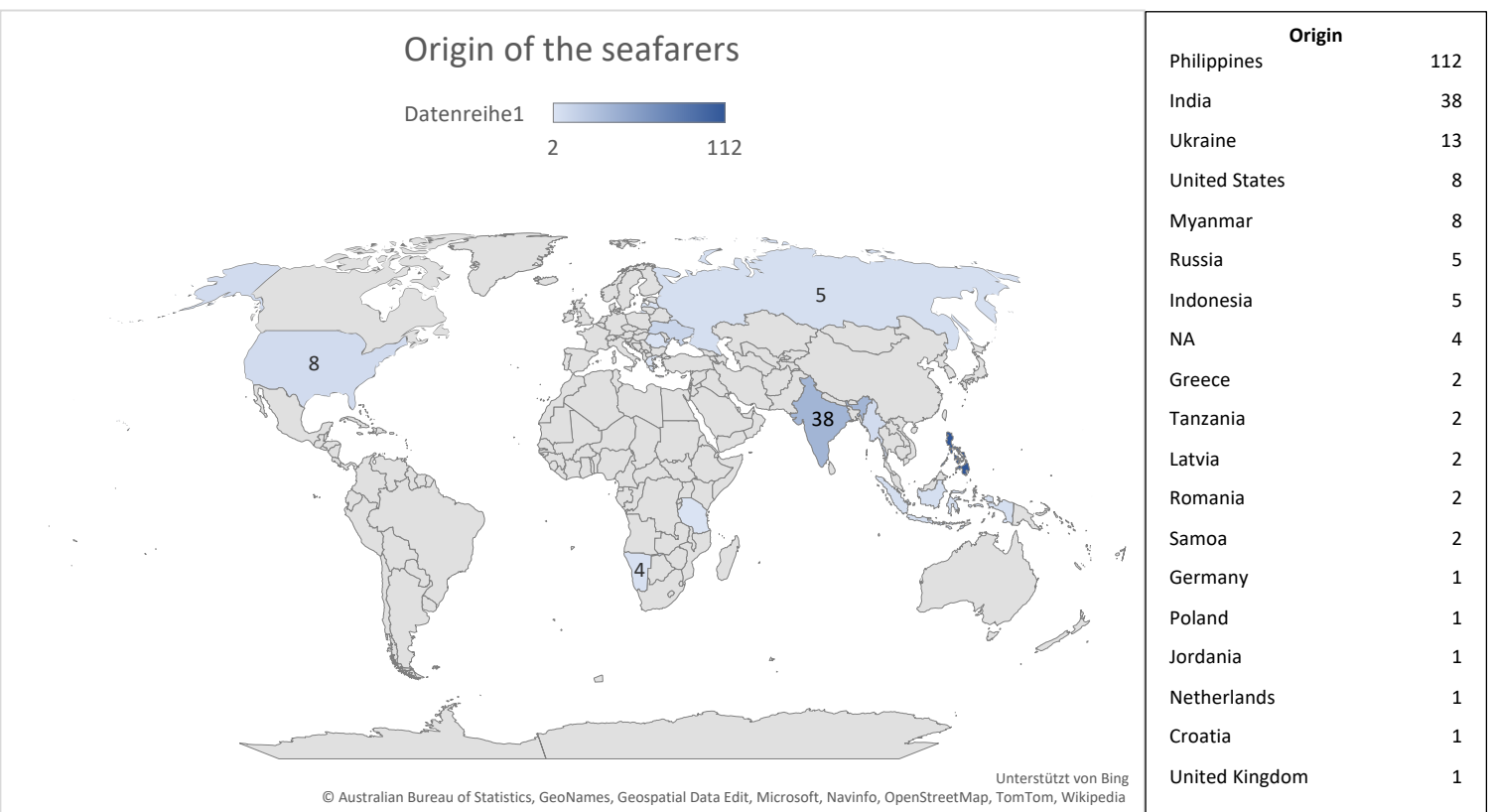
Description: Respondents from the deck department (108/ 52%) closely reflect the industry average. We also recorded average numbers from the engine department (80/ 38%) and the galley (17/ 8%). The distribution between officers (or engineers) (72/ 34%) and crew (116/ 56%) is also closely within the range of normal distribution. No answer was provided by (2/ 1%).



Interpretation: This question is relevant; because of the different responsibilities and functions on board, the perspective of a master is necessarily different from that of a cook.

Question 4: Nationality (What is your nationality?)

Description: This question reflects the wide variety of seafarers' nationalities. There is a clear emphasis on Filipinos (112/ 54%) and Indians (38/ 18%); all told, a total of 79% seafarers are from Asia. 13% of the respondents were European, 4% from the United States,



and 1% from Africa, the Middle East, and Polynesia, respectively. 1% did not reply. Altogether, seafarers from a total 18 nations participated in the survey.

Interpretation: In comparison to 2021 visitor statistics from the “Deutsche Seemannsmission Hamburg-Harburg”, the respondents’ nationalities are nearly average. The otherwise large group of Chinese seafarers is, however, missing in this survey. This could in part be due to language barriers as well as to the strict Covid-19-related hygiene policies prevalent on board Chinese vessels.

Question 5: Mood of the Seafarers (How are you feeling?)

Description: The seafarers who completed the questionnaire in the seamen’s club (n=118) answered as following: (22/ 19%) of the respondents rate their current feelings as being “very good”, and (80/ 68%) as “good”. (5/ 4%) of the seafarer’s gave a highly positive response such as “excellent”. (11/ 9%) claimed their mood was more on the negative side, with responses such as “bored” or “great but sad”.

Seafarers who completed the questionnaire on board their ship (n=89) responded as follows: (15/ 17%) seafarers said they felt “very good” and (73/ 81%) “good”. (2/ 2%) provided no answer.

In comparison: When comparing the responses to questions 6, 7 and 14, (12/ 13%) of the seafarers who had completed the questionnaire on board answered question 5 as feeling “good”, but answered questions 6, 7 and/or 14 as being “busy”, “short stay” or having “no time” for shore leave. Of the respondents who completed the questionnaire in the seamen’s club, merely three seafarers mentioned a short stay in port or their working schedule as being a problem.

Interpretation: One must bear in mind that (163/ 79%) of all seafarer respondents have an Asian background. Taking cultural differences into account, there can easily be a difference between a European and an Asian claiming to feel “good” -- especially in the context of a public expression of polite communication.

Question 6: Shore Leave (Is there a possibility of shore leave?)

Description: (182/ 88%) of the questioned seafarers answered “yes”, so shore leave is generally allowed. (19/ 10%) of the seafarers gave a “no” response, thus no shore leave, and (5/ 2%) did not answer. We must take in consideration the fact that some major Asian shipping companies still do not allow seafarers to go ashore, or even to permit a ship visit by the seamen’s mission. This can also be seen in the question of nationalities: no Chinese seafarers were surveyed. The true number of seafarers having no shore leave is therefore most likely far higher. We are not able to estimate how large this number truly is.

Interpretation: The 88% of seafarers who now have access to shore leave is a large improvement over earlier studies, but still: over 10% of seafarers are still not able to take their MLC right of shore leave. The arguments for not granting shore leave are often “force majeure” or ship safety. This is, however, clearly an illegal interpretation of international maritime law; the reason for refusing shore leave should be a one-off decision by the master of the vessel in case of a concrete danger, and not a general policy of the company.

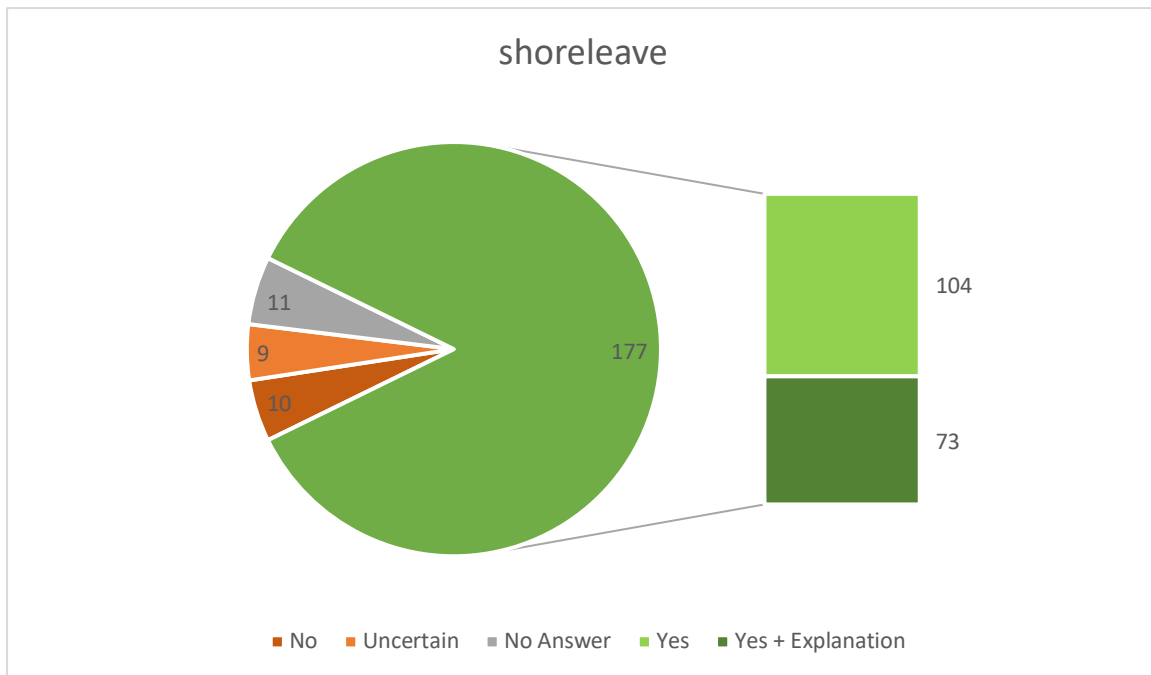
Question 7: Shore Leave Possibility (If possible would you go ashore?)

Description: (177/ 86%) of the seafarers replied “yes” -- they would go ashore if possible. Of those seafarers, 41% not only said “yes” but also expressed the reason for it.

(50/ 24%) of the seafarers provided an answer that is related to the seafarer’s mental health, indicating that they need shore leave for their mental wellbeing (such as building up resistance against stress).

Shopping and refreshment, fun and entertainment, sports and “hanging out/ chilling” were mentioned by (31/ 15%) of the seafarers.

(10/ 5%) said “no”, (9/ 4%) said “uncertain” and (11/ 5%) did not give an answer.



Interpretation: Taking into account the high response rate and the luxury of the respondents providing such a wealth of information, we can assume the following: shore leave is highly important for seafarers and their mental wellbeing. Comparing this importance to the actual possibility to go on shore leave as analysed in question 8, we may also assume that there are reasons outside of the power of the seafarers that prevent them from going ashore.

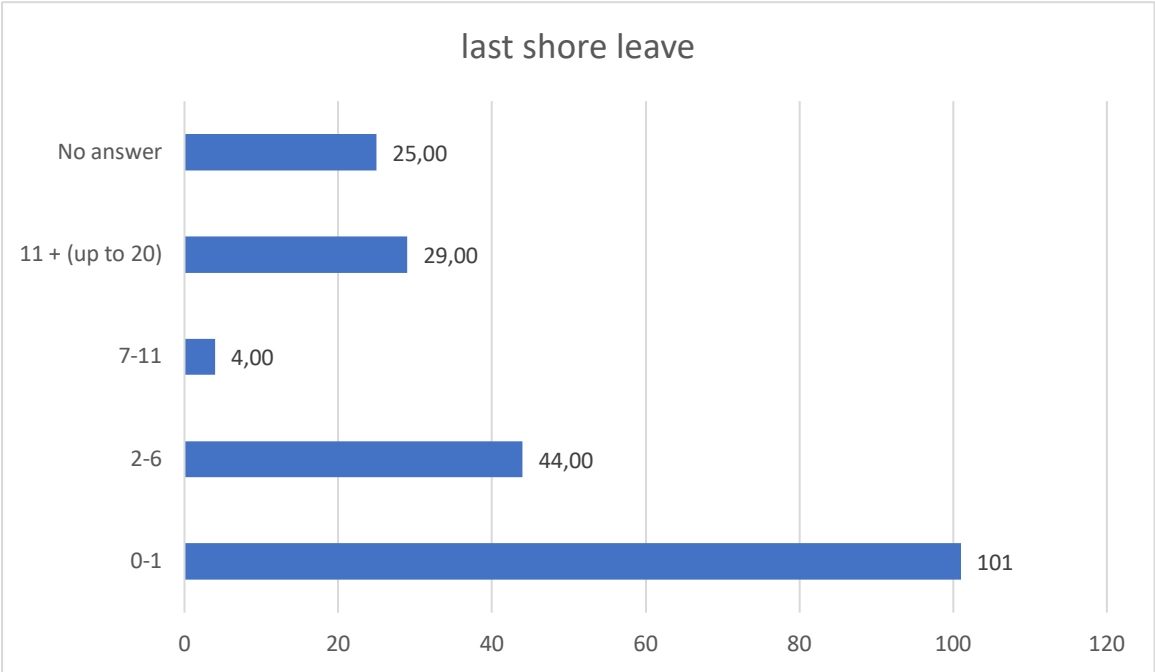
Based on professional experiences in our daily work, it is clear that seafarers who want to go ashore, who have the possibility to visit ashore or to a seamen's club, and who have already gotten shore leave on a regular basis are emotionally, mentally and spiritually strengthened.

From a research and welfare background we therefore strongly support and recommend shore leave for seafarers -- whenever possible!

Question 8: Last Shore Leave (When was your last shore leave?)

Description: (101/ 49%) of the respondents answered that they had had shore leave within the last month; (44/ 21%) claimed that they gone on shore leave within the last two to six months, and (4/ 2%) said that they had had shore leave in the last seven to 11 months. (29/ 14%) answered that their last shore leave had been more than 11 months ago (up to 20 months). (25/ 14%) did not answer.

Interpretation: Saying that one month as a regular schedule for receiving shore leave is normal due to workload and shift systems in port, and taking psycho social disorders into account there, is a majority of seafarers who are in a stress- or harmful situation. Our experiences show that seafarers start getting confused and show the first signs of fatigue and psycho social disorders after one month of no shore leave. 21% are in danger of experiencing stress and an impairment of their complete mental faculties. 16% are definitely in a situation of psychosocial stress disorders such as a burnout, fatigue and restlessness. Surely the 14% who said their last shore leave was longer than 11 months ago are already in their next contract, but this still shows that they had more than one contract without shore leave. This means between three months (for a typical European officer) and nine to 11 months (for a typical Asian deckhand) of not getting in touch with solid ground!



Question 9: Repatriation (Do you see problems getting repatriated compared to 2019?)

Description: (167/ 81%) of all questioned seafarers answered “no”, so there appears to be no difference in repatriation today versus 2019. (23/ 11%) did not give an answer, (17/ 8%) did notice a difference because of Covid-19 (of the total 8%: a share of 4%), the Brexit and wars (from a seafarer from Myanmar).

Interpretation: At present there seems to be no major issue concerning repatriation rights.

Question 10: Vaccination Rate of the Seafarers (Are you vaccinated against Covid-19?)

Description: (4+8/ 7%) of the questioned seafarers either said “no” or did not give an answer. (195/ 93%) had been vaccinated at least once. Within this 93%, (21/ 10%) had been vaccinated once, (51/ 4%) had received two vaccinations, and (123/ 53%) three vaccinations/ boosters.

Vaccine	Dosage (n=501)	%
Biontec-Pfizer	78	15,5%
Janssen	65	13%
Astra/ Covshield	49	10%
Moderna	23	4,5%
Sinovac	10	2%
Sputnik	7	1,5%
Vaccine name not known	3	0,5%
Did not know which vaccine	266	53%
Multiple responses possible – vaccine dosages were counted by replies		

The following data is based on the number of persons immunized and not on the number of immunizations. This is the reason for the different values. (60/ 28%) did not mention the name of their vaccine. (65/ 31%) mentioned only one vaccine in one of the three questionnaire fields but claimed that they had received two vaccinations. (38/ 18%) had been vaccinated at least twice with the same EMA-certified vaccine. (35/ 16%) had been vaccinated two times with more than one EMA-certified vaccine – so they can at least be regarded as being basically EU-certified vaccinated.

In summary, (124/ 60%) have been vaccinated at least once with an EMA-certified vaccine; (42/ 20%) have been vaccinated twice, (18/ 8%) have been vaccinated and also received a booster inoculation with an EMA-certified vaccine.

Interpretation: No interpretation to these statistics is necessary.

Question 11 a: Bullying/ Harassment on Board (Have you experienced bullying/harassment on board?)

Description: (195/ 94%) replied that they have not personally experienced bullying or harassment on board. (4/ 2%) had experienced bullying or harassment twice on board, and (6/ 3%) had experienced this more than two times. (2/ 1%) did not reply to the question.

Interpretation: In addition to the questions concerning shore leave, this is the question with the widest range of answers. Where there are no seafarers saying they have experienced bullying only once, this leads us to the interpretation that if there is bullying on board, the affected person gets victimized more often. If everybody wants to make a statement it is a topic of concern whether they see themselves exposed to it or not.

Question 11 b: Bullying or Harassment on Board (Have you seen or heard of bullying or harassment on board?)

Description: (5/ 2 %) have seen or heard of one instance of bullying or harassment on board. (1/ 1%) have seen or heard of two instances. (13/ 6%) have heard of or seen bullying/harassment more than two times on board. (6/ 3%) did not reply.

Interpretation: The number of seafarers who have seen or heard of bullying/harassment on board is higher than the number of seafarers who had themselves experienced bullying and harassment on board. This is what we expected.

Question 12: Bullying or Harassment on Board (Do you know about support concerning bullying/harassment?)

Description: (17/ 8%) did not provide an answer. (131/ 63%) replied that they do not know where they can find support. (61/ 29%) answered that they do know how to find support and help in a bullying/harassment situation.

A few quotes from the seafarers provide an overview about their ways of getting support:

Responses such as “company policy”, “captain”, “seamen’s centre”, “counselling by company doctor“, “bullying has no place in this industry” and “don’t be silent”. Most answers refer to support from senior officers, colleagues and company policy on board.

Comparison 11a +11b +12: (49/ 23%) know how to find help, but have not had any personal experience or exposure to bullying or harassment. (9/ 4%) have had experience and know how to find help. (11/ 5%) have had experience with bullying/harassment but do not know about the support available.

Interpretation: It appears that the overall situation is not severe. Comparing the survey results with overall German statistics about harassment at work, the situation on board seems to be less severe than it is ashore. Nonetheless, 5% of the questioned seafarers have endured a form of harassment and do not know about help structures. Language, culture, age, nationality, religion, hierarchy and other circumstances seem to influence the interpersonal communication and with that the harassment. The overall resilience and experiences gained in maritime life might help the individual to endure difficult situations better than the overall population. A term used to explain this phenomenon is “Ambiguity tolerance”.

The statements provided by the seafarers indicate that company policies and senior officers are often seen as the primary sources of help, who can also see that the seafarer gets fast support on board in the event of harassment or bullying. These two components should be supported to maximize the support of victimized seafarers.

Finally, it must be said that an “unreported study” is always difficult. The topic of bullying and harassment is basically a topic of shame or embarrassment. Many seafarers who claim that they haven’t had any personal experience in bullying or harassment might provide a different answer in a different setting.

Question 13: Mental State (How mentally strong are you feeling?)

Description:

Weak	Average	Strong	Heroic	N/N
2/ 1%	37/ 18%	136/ 65%	22/ 11%	10/ 5%

Interpretation: Although the response “heroic” was a bit of an irony to see if the seafarers recognized it as such, it was still answered by 22 seafarers – with one of them indicating that he understood by leaving a smiley behind his answer. It seems that seafarers see themselves as strong characters.

Question 14: Situation on Board (Would you like to say something about the current situation on board?)

Description: (90/ 44%) of the respondents did not answer this open-end question. (73/ 35%) mentioned something in the direction of “good”, with (15/ 7%) providing an answer with more substance. Within the 7% of the more detailed answers, we find answers relating to “not paid overtime”, “blaming culture on board”, “not paid cash advance”, “short port stays” and various answers related to stress such as Covid-19, schedule and bullying.

A few examples: “Every time SHIFTING, no time to go ashore”, “Colleagues are supportive, only limited time port stay is the problem.” “Always busy at their work only once/week we do videoke (we assume he means karaoke)” and “Bullying happens but people don’t like to complain and make complicated. It’s falt.” (sic)

Interpretation: With 44% not answering this question, possibly the question is either irrelevant for many seafarers, we worded it too difficultly, the questionnaire was too long or the seafarers didn’t want to make the effort. Nevertheless, those who did answer gave us some interesting results as mentioned above. Longer answers were often related to the working conditions on board, a short port stay and no ability to go ashore. We would especially like to point to the work intensification mentioned by the seafarers that leads to the inability to get shore leave and the resultant mental health issues.

Further Comments

In these “further comments” we will take an overview of some of the outstanding responses and compare the answers to different questions to form a composite picture. Especially in combination with questions 5, 13 and the questions about shore leave, we see a number of outstanding combinations.

These following three questionnaires were filled out in the seamen’s club:

We would like to highlight a Ukrainian fitter who not only was in a good mood but also thanked us for the questionnaire, and an Indian 4th Engineer who felt excellent and added a smiley.

The Hellenic master felt very positive about being able to go ashore and recognized the positive mental health aspects associated with shore leave -- but had nevertheless not been

ashore for more than 30 months. He nonetheless felt mentally strong and had an “all normal” situation on board. We can picture here a seafarer with a high level of perseverance.

An electrical engineer from India felt wonderful about being able to go ashore – and knows it is good for his relaxation, but has not been ashore for the last three months. He has been bullied more often but does not consider it as bullying in a serious way. He says he feels mentally weak and commented: “Bullying happens but people don’t like to complain and make complicated. It’s falt.” (quote is written as the seafarer gave it).

These following three questionnaires were filled out on board during ship visits:

A Filipino chief cook feels good, does not see an opportunity to go ashore because of very short stays in port, but recognizes the need for shore leave in order to relax. His last shore leave was two months ago but he still feel mentally strong, commenting: “Always busy at their work only once/week we do videoke (we guess he means karaoke)”

An AB from the Philippines feels fine despite the fact that he can’t go ashore because he is too busy (last shore leave was six months ago). He had also experienced bullying in the past more often. When harassed, he received support from non-Filipinos. He still feels mentally strong and mentions that he is always shifting and does not have time to go ashore.

A 3rd Engineer from the Philippines feels normal despite not being able to go ashore because of short stays in port. He realizes that it is a moment of relaxation for him to be able to go ashore. He is still feeling mentally strong, experiences his colleagues as supportive and only sees the limited time in port as the problem.

Summary

All in all, most seafarers said that they are feeling good. However, we assume that this “good” is sometimes a culturally influenced “good” in the form of polite communication. Over two thirds of the seafarers said they have access to shore leave and about the same number of seafarers would take the advantage of shore leave if it were offered. Only half of the respondents had had shore leave during the last month. The question about repatriation did not show any reason for concern. With 93% of seafarers having been vaccinated against Covid-19, the programmes of administering at least the first vaccination dose to seafarers have been highly successful. The number of seafarers with a second shot or a booster is much lower and decreases down to 8% who have received their “booster”. Experiencing or

seeing bullying/harassment don't seem to be a widely spread issue on board compared to statistics about "mobbing" in German companies. We assume that different factors influence this result. Seafarers seem to experience behaviour as a form of harassment much later than people ashore. In the question regarding their mental health, most seafarers picture themselves as being strong. We assume that the rigid hierarchy and discipline on board within a mostly male community create the image of a strong, heroic seafarer, which does not allow them to admit their true feelings. The majority of the seafarers did not comment on the situation on board. Nevertheless, the seafarers who did provide a short answer gave a positive description to the overall crew situation on board. Longer answers mostly described specific problems such as work schedules, bullying e.g.

About

The Deutsche Seemannsmission Hamburg-Harburg e.V. is a charity with a protestant church background. It is one of the dedicated welfare providers (by the German federal government) for seafarers in the port of Hamburg, Germany. The Deutsche Seemannsmission Hamburg-Harburg e.V. has been found in 1910.

Deacon Jörn Hille, has a BA Social Work and MA in Religious Education. He is Senior Chaplain of ship visiting Department in Hamburg port.

Deacon Sören Wichmann has a BA Social Work and church exam in Chaplaincy. He is Senior Chaplain of the international seamen's club Duckdalben in the port of Hamburg.