

MENTAL HEALTH ONBOARD

The state of the Superyacht Sector

 QUAY CREW

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



MENTAL HEALTH
SUPPORT SOLUTIONS

INTRODUCTION



As part of a unique industry partnership, Mental Health Support Solutions (MHSS) commissioned superyacht recruitment agency, Quay Crew, to carry out a mental health survey with crew via the company's opted-in candidate database.

Over 1,000 anonymous recipients from more than 50 countries shared their mental health experiences. We hope to use the findings detailed in this report to highlight the most critical concerns among crew and possible causes of poor mental health to encourage the improved provision of support services across the sector.



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FOREWORD

TIM CLARKE

DIRECTOR, QUAY CREW

“Anecdotal evidence from conversations with Captains, HODs and hundreds of superyacht crew has highlighted just how many people onboard suffer with poor mental health, sometimes with tragic consequences.

As a team, our consultants also have over 30 years’ experience working onboard yachts and most of us have experienced the mental health concerns of fellow crew members first-hand.

In the yachting sector, we all know being a crew member can be highly rewarding, but it’s also tiring, involves working long hours and spending long periods of time away from home.

However, mental health issues are not necessarily endemic to the superyacht sector, and I suspect are just as prevalent in other industries - after all, most of us spend more time at work than outside of it.

What doesn’t help, though, is that we are lagging way behind compared to land-based corporates who are providing employees with training, resources, and support.

This survey has uncovered some strong statistics that reveal just how common poor mental health is in the industry and how onboard environments often contribute. It also confirms our suspicions that very few have access to the support they need, when they need it, especially from those who specialize in mental health.

We hope that those with the power to make changes use these findings to introduce policies, practices and preventative measures that will support the wellbeing of crew. In-turn, this will improve longevity, productivity and promote the superyacht industry as one in which people can enjoy a long and prosperous career.”



QUAY CREW

CHARLES WATKINS

MANAGING DIRECTOR AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, MHSS

“Our survey paints a bleak picture of the superyacht industry, with crew struggling mentally as they deal with a myriad of challenges such as long working hours, limited sleep, loneliness and a lack of mental health support while at sea.

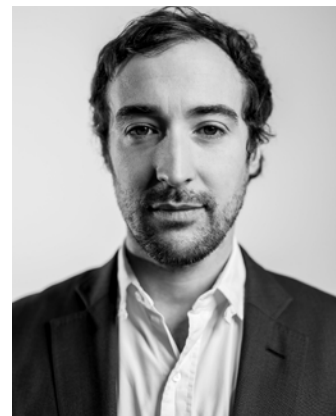
Tension and conflict with colleagues have also contributed to increased stress and anxiety among crew - perhaps explaining why 50% of respondents admitted to thinking about leaving the industry. Most have stayed because of the relatively good salary on offer, but at what cost to their personal wellbeing? Money alone will unlikely stop people from eventually leaving if their physical and mental health are at stake.

Retaining existing crew who feel exhausted and possibly disillusioned is just one challenge facing superyacht companies. Another is attracting younger generations to a physically and mentally demanding industry that offers little respite for staff working in the galley, interior, on deck or as an engineer. Young people who do join the sector then need convincing to stick around beyond a season or two.

In a worst-case scenario, the mental health crisis will create a huge skills shortage for superyacht operators. So, what can they do to prevent this potential nightmare becoming a reality? Listening to and understanding the concerns of existing crew is a start, as this gives employers the insights needed to introduce positive changes.

Providing mental health support by giving staff access to professional psychologists with maritime experience will also make a huge difference. Generally speaking, one-in-four people are expected to face mental health problems at some point in their lives, and anyone working in this sector is no exception.

As our survey shows, superyacht crew are struggling and need help now; without it, they may leave the industry harbouring a chronic mental health illness that requires urgent treatment. But the work-related issues that forced them to disembark will remain, which is something superyacht companies must address. Failure to do so will lead to a sector-wide mental health crisis and create a major recruitment headache for employers.”



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE SUPERYACHT SECTOR IS ON THE VERGE OF A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS.

Over half of superyacht crew say their mental health has deteriorated since working in the sector, with **one in five currently suffering** with poor mental health whilst onboard and a third having experienced this in the past.

Crew members across all departments (interior, galley, deck and engineering) suffer mostly from **stress, anxiety and loneliness** caused by burnout and fatigue, crew tension and politics, and poor sleep onboard.

As a result, almost **50%** have considered leaving the yachting sector, but most choose not to because of the financial benefits.

In terms of comparisons, mental health concerns are **more prevalent among female crew** and particularly common in the interior and galley departments. There also appears to be a correlation between the length of time someone has worked in the yachting industry, the amount of leave a crew member gets and their state of mind.

The findings are potentially catastrophic for the industry which, if not addressed, could not only lead to tragic consequences on an individual level, but cause a mass exodus of crew and long-term recruitment challenges in an already candidate short market.

With **62%** claiming they are not aware of any policies or practices to address mental health issues, but almost three quarters saying they would like access to dedicated support and resources, the superyacht industry needs to take urgent action.

Some form of mental health training would be well received, the survey reveals. Although nine in 10 crew members say they have not received such training since working in yachting, **85%** of them would find it useful.

This may also increase the openness onboard of discussing mental health concerns when they arise. Currently, **30% of crew would most likely speak to family** if they felt they were struggling with poor mental health. In comparison, 30% would talk to a fellow crew member; 14% to the Captain; and only 4% to their Head of Department (HOD).

Positive mental health and crew wellbeing needs to be a key focus for owners, management companies, Captains and HODs. Compared to the operating costs of a superyacht, the provision of support services and training is extremely affordable. In addition, the survey results suggest that even small changes to onboard working patterns, culture and leave packages could have a profound effect.

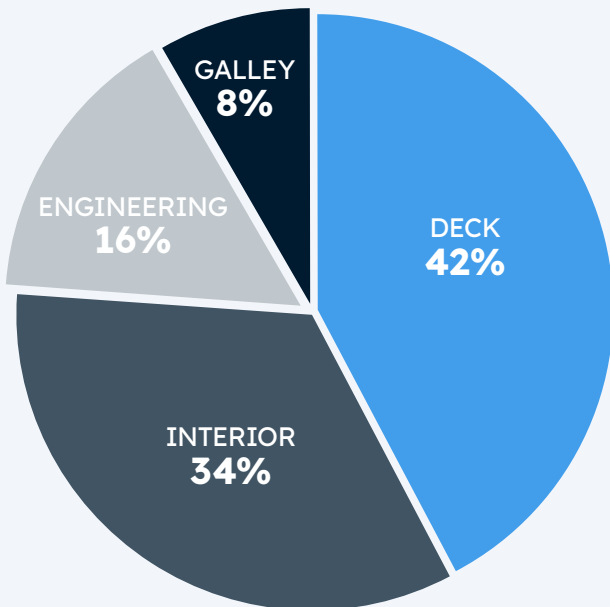
Combined, these preventative measures could not only ensure help is available to crew when they need it most, but encourage loyalty and longevity.



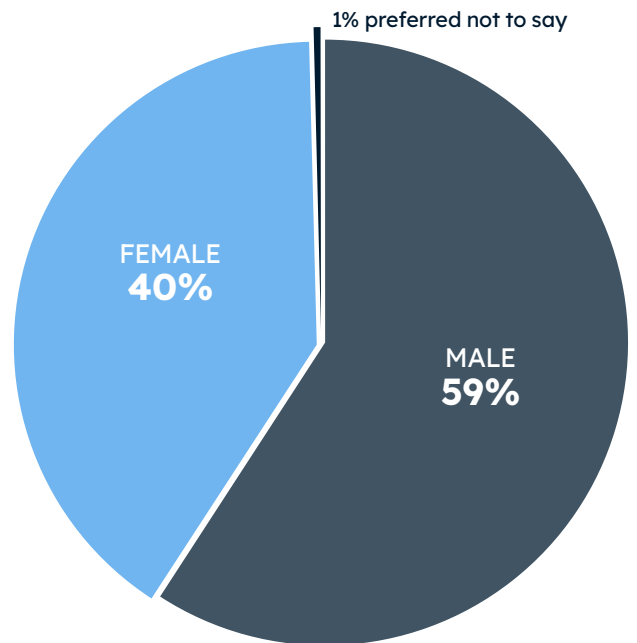
FINDINGS

THE DEMOGRAPHICS

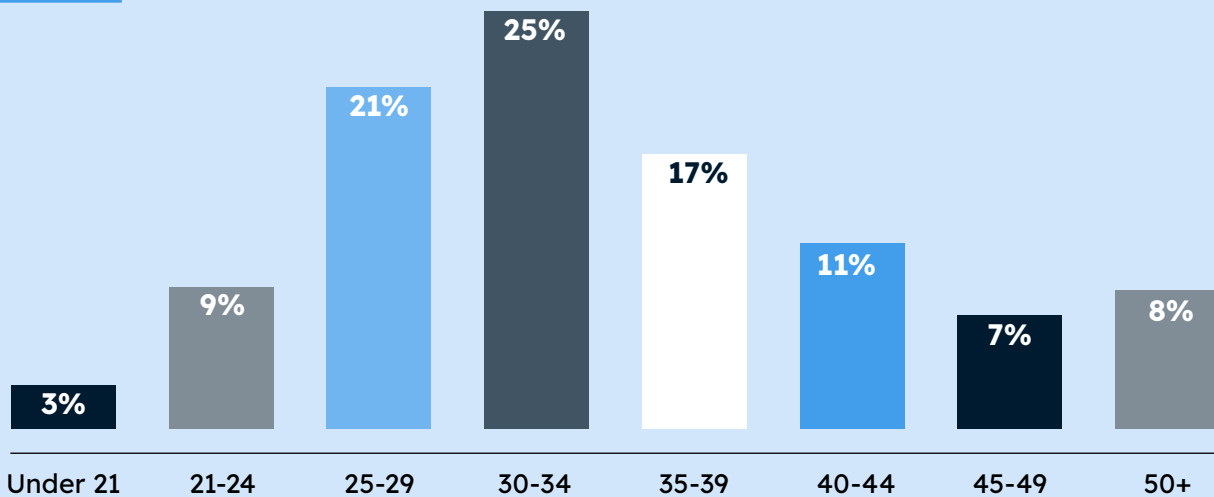
DEPARTMENT



GENDER

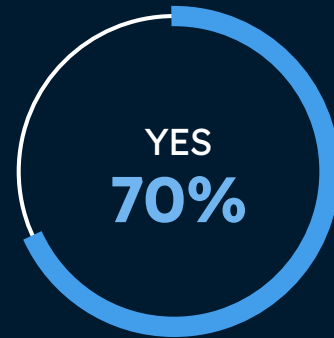


AGE

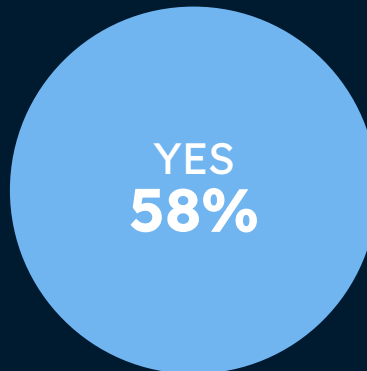
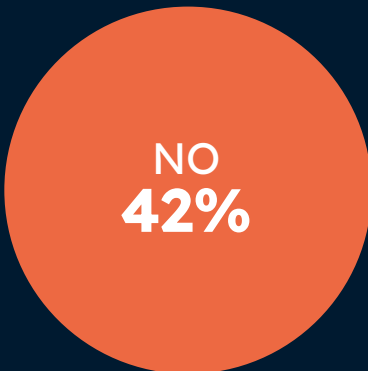


KNOWLEDGE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

1. Do you feel you know enough about mental health and the symptoms to be able to recognize these in yourself and others?



2. Do you feel you know enough about what you can do should you experience mental health difficulties?

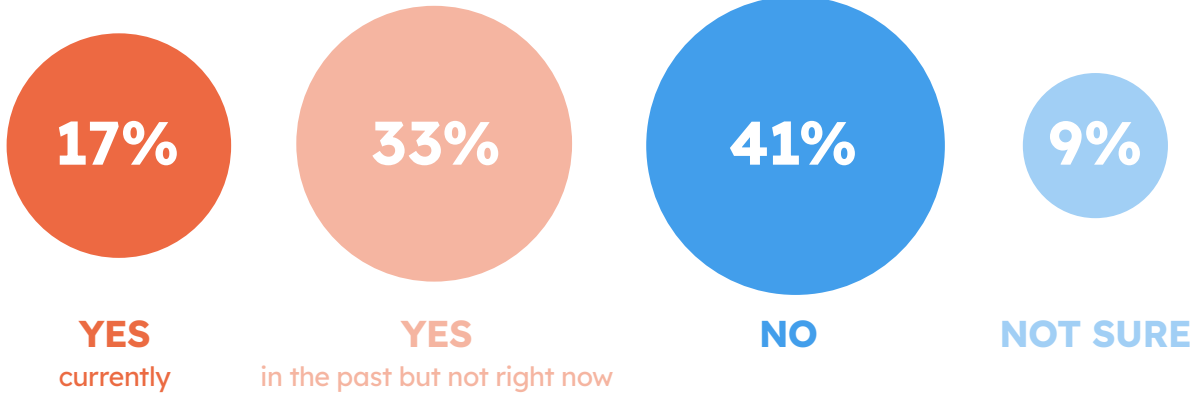


“The first step in combating poor mental health is helping people to understand how to recognise their feelings and how they might be able to adopt certain coping mechanisms to help them through everyday challenges. While most crew say they are aware of this, almost a third are unsure how to identify their own or others’ warning signs and two fifths aren’t confident about helping themselves or colleagues.”

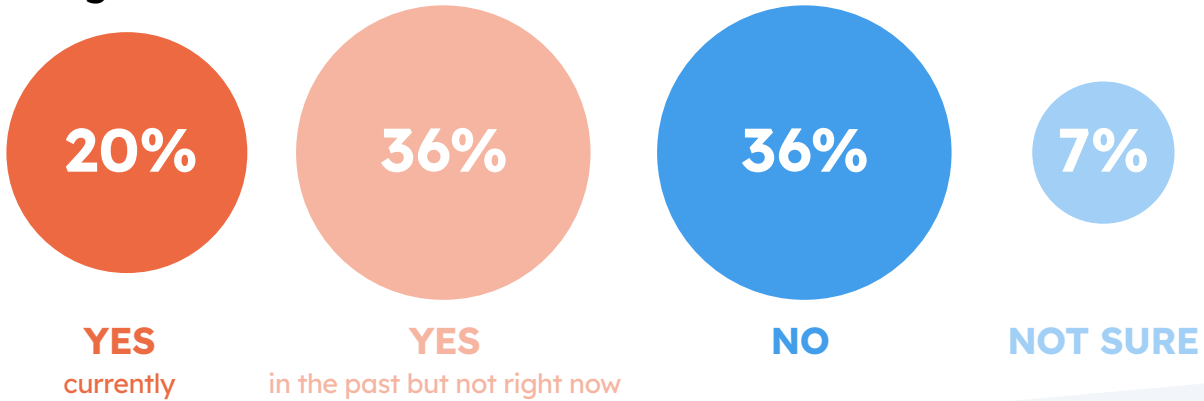
Charles Watkins, MHSS

EXPERIENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

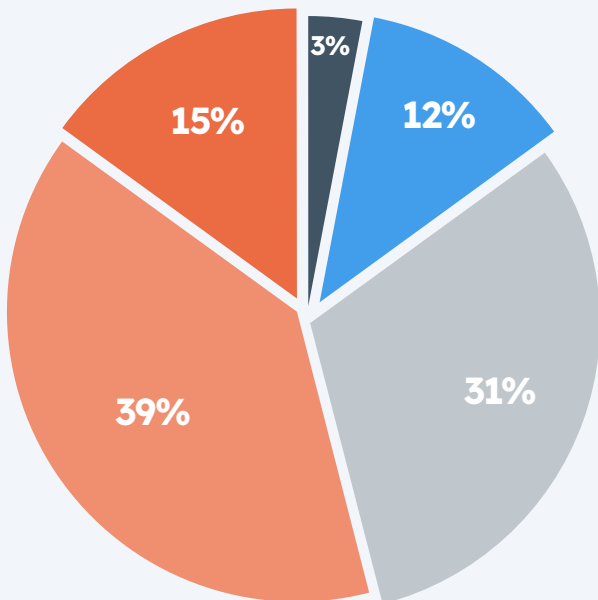
1. Have you ever/do you suffer with poor mental health generally?



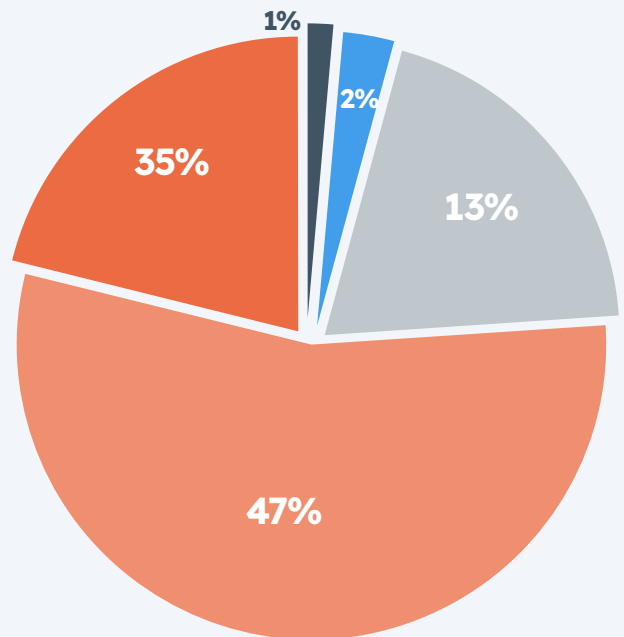
2. Have you ever/do you suffer with poor mental health whilst working onboard?



3. How would you rate your mental health at work?



4. How would you rate your mental health outside of work?

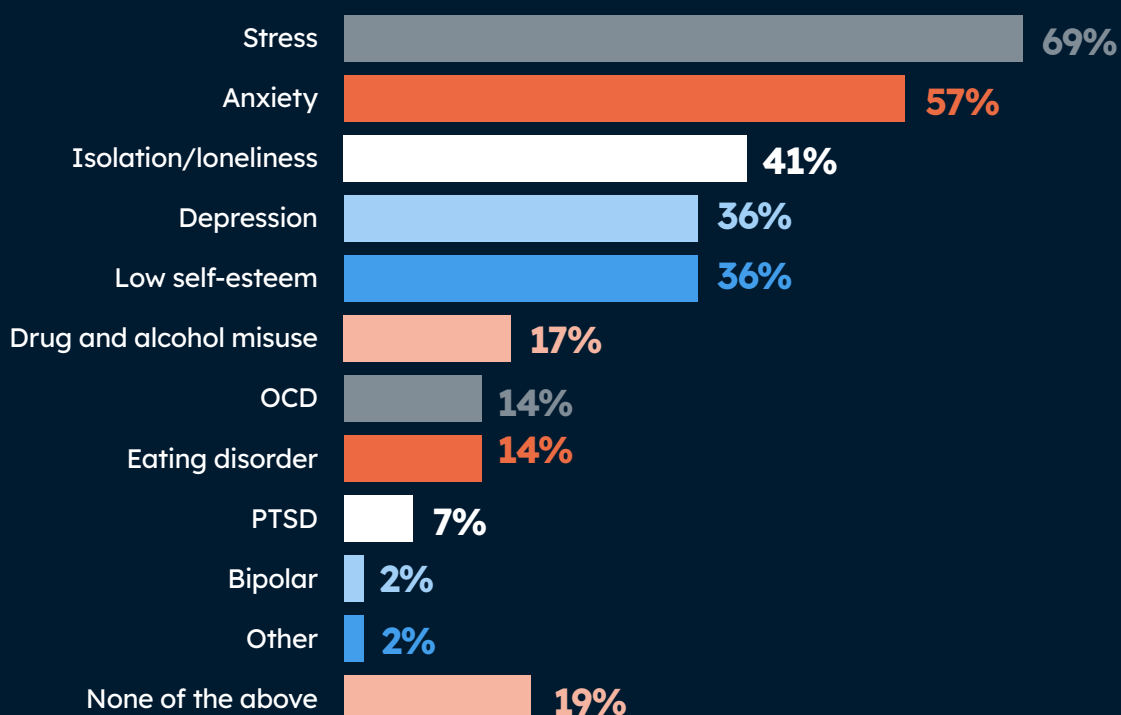


Extremely poor Poor Average Good Excellent

5. How would you rate your overall mood when you are working onboard on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being extremely unhappy, 10 being extremely happy)?



6. Have you ever suffered with:

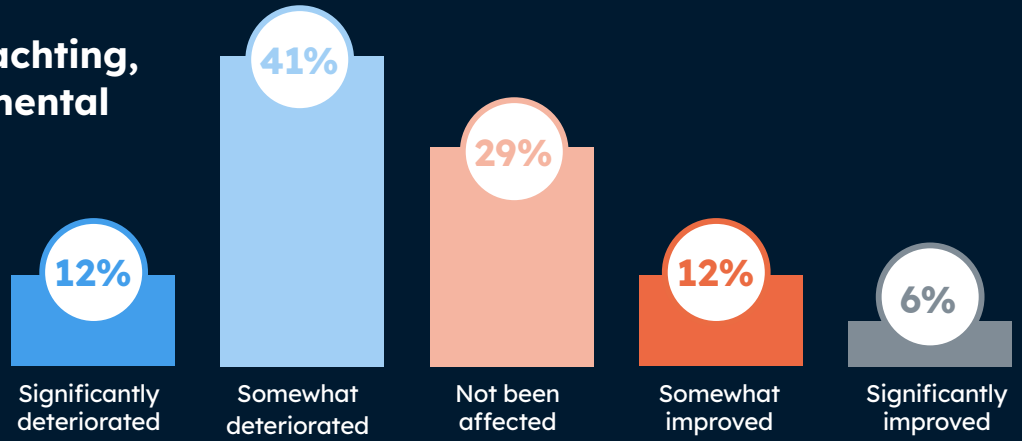


“While it seems initially encouraging to see that only a small proportion of crew rate their mental health as poor whilst onboard, there is still a 12% increase when comparing it to how they feel outside of work. This also contradicts the findings that one fifth are struggling with mental health issues onboard right now and a further 36% have felt this way in the past. Levels of stress and anxiety also seem high which, if preventative measures or coping mechanisms were in place, could potentially be improved significantly.”

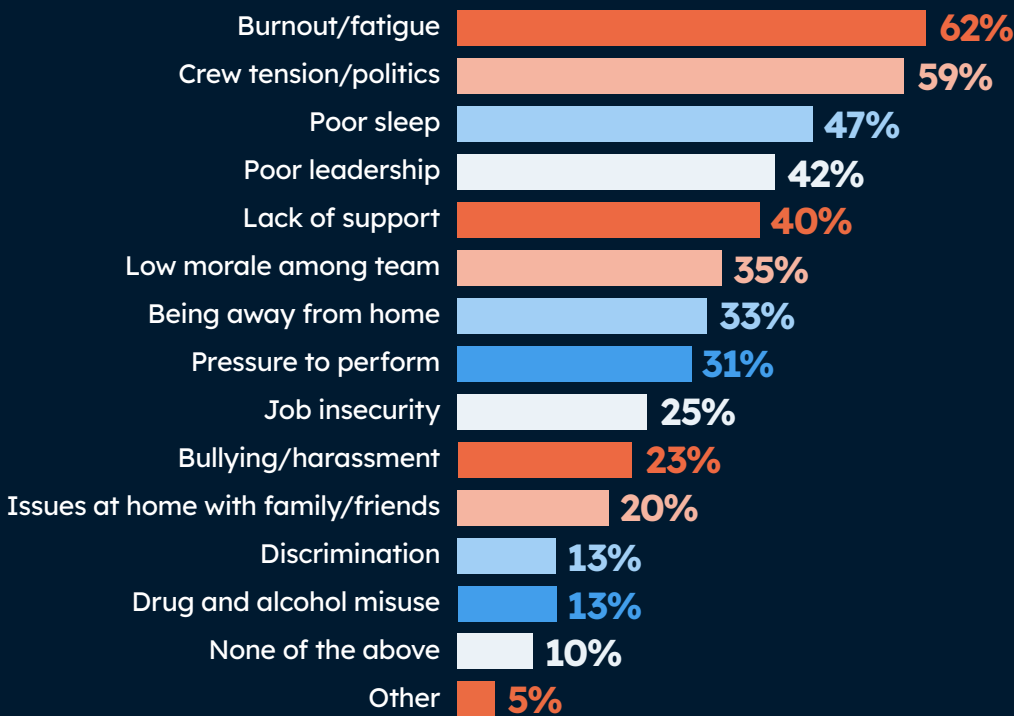
Tim Clarke, Quay Crew

THE EFFECT OF WORKING IN YACHTING

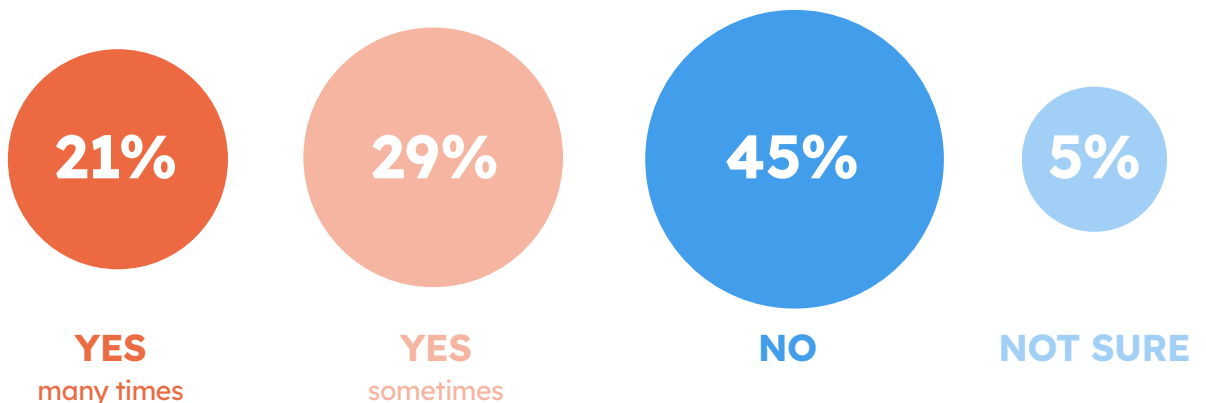
1. Since working in yachting, would you say your mental health has..



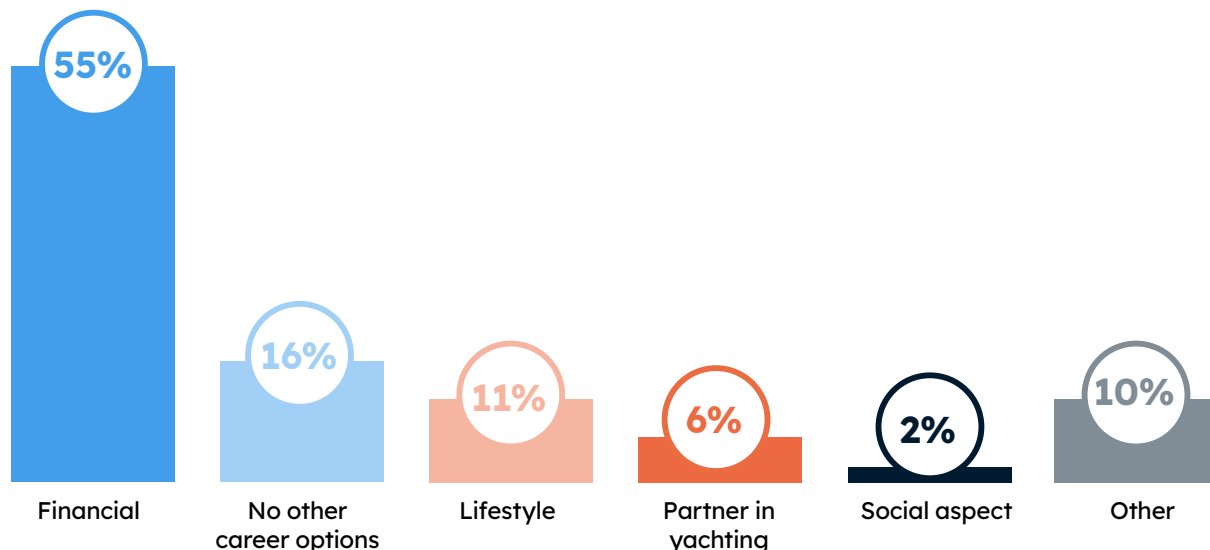
2. What contributes to your poor mental health onboard?



3. Have you ever felt like leaving the yachting sector due to mental health issues?



4. If you answered yes, what has stopped you leaving?



5. Have you experienced or are you aware of any fellow crew members who have struggled with mental health issues onboard?



“

“The salary is the main reason why many of the crew who admitted to thinking about leaving the industry are still working on superyachts. While remuneration is important, younger generations want more than just good money to accept or stay in a role.

Superyacht companies must take note by supporting workers with their mental wellbeing. The industry is demanding, with crew expected to work long hours which takes its toll both physically and mentally. Staff can practice self-care and good mental hygiene, but no matter how well they look after themselves, their health will eventually suffer if working in a toxic environment. It’s a question of when, not if.”

Charles Watkins, MHSS

“

“The fact that over half of crew have seen their mental health deteriorate since working in yachting and have considered leaving the sector is astounding and, potentially damning. The contributing factors, however, could be alleviated with some changes to onboard working practices, structure and, of course, leadership training.

Building a decent career on a yacht and positive mental wellbeing should not be an either / or situation.”

Tim Clarke, Quay Crew

SUPPORT IN THE SUPERYACHT SECTOR

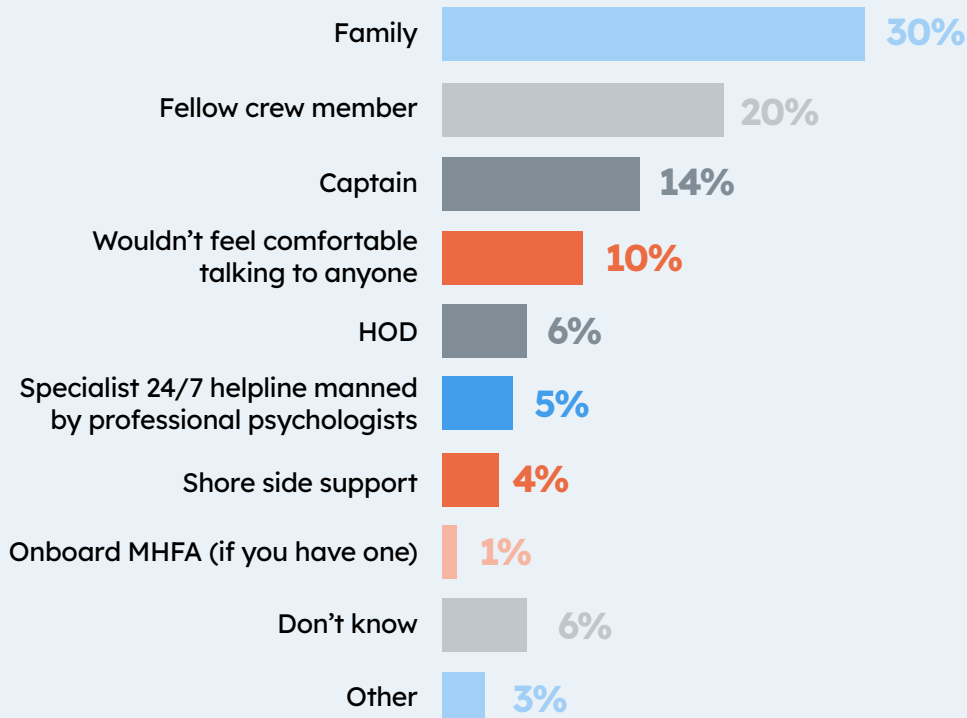
1. Do you have a Mental Health First Aider onboard?



2. Does the yacht/management company supply you with access to any on shore mental health support?



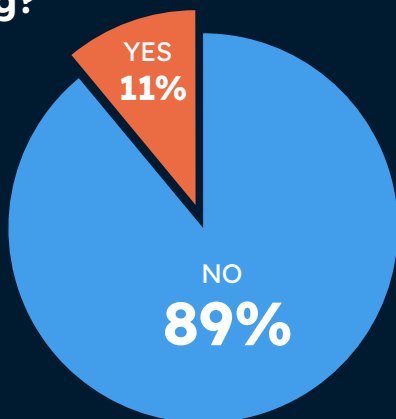
3. If you were struggling with a mental health issue onboard, would you be most likely to talk to:



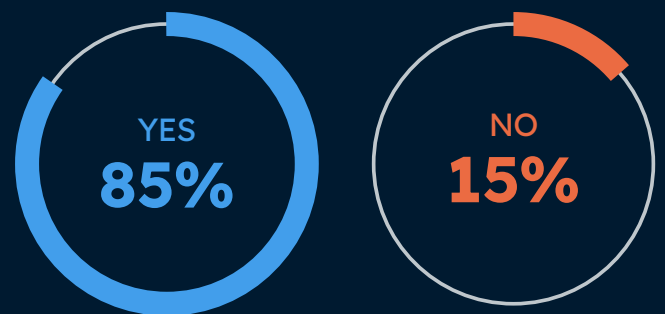
4. Are you aware of any policies or practices onboard to address mental health issues?



5. Have you ever received mental health training since working in yachting?



6. Did you find it/would it be useful?



“It’s astonishing to find that 89% of crew have received no mental health training since heading to sea, while 62% say they aren’t aware of any onboard policies or practices to address mental health issues.

Companies are either failing to provide help or to communicate what’s available to their employees. Either way, there’s clearly a disconnect between what staff need in terms of mental health support and what they think is accessible through their company.

This needs to change - and soon - or companies will potentially lose good workers who have reached their physical and/or mental limit.”

Charles Watkins, MHSS



“The sheer lack of available support for crew is shocking. Even if yachts have put measures in place, it’s clear they are not actively promoting these.

Given that we have identified that the main causes of poor mental health could in fact be prevented, investment in services could be cost-effective on all levels - operational performance, crew productivity and longevity, minimising recruitment costs and improving overall onboard experience - for owners, guests and crew.

Perhaps most surprising here is that despite just 13% admitting previously that drug and alcohol misuse contributes to their own poor mental health onboard, three in five believe it is an issue overall.”

Tim Clarke, Quay Crew



7. To which extent do you agree/disagree with the following (1-5):



a. I feel comfortable going to my HOD with mental health issues



b. I feel well supported if I am unhappy or down onboard



c. My employer provides resources and services that meet my mental health and wellbeing needs



d. Positive mental health onboard is a priority for my employer



e. I have enough downtime to focus on myself



f. My employer would support me if I needed time off for mental health issues



g. Drug and alcohol misuse contributes to mental health issues onboard



COMPARABLE FACTORS

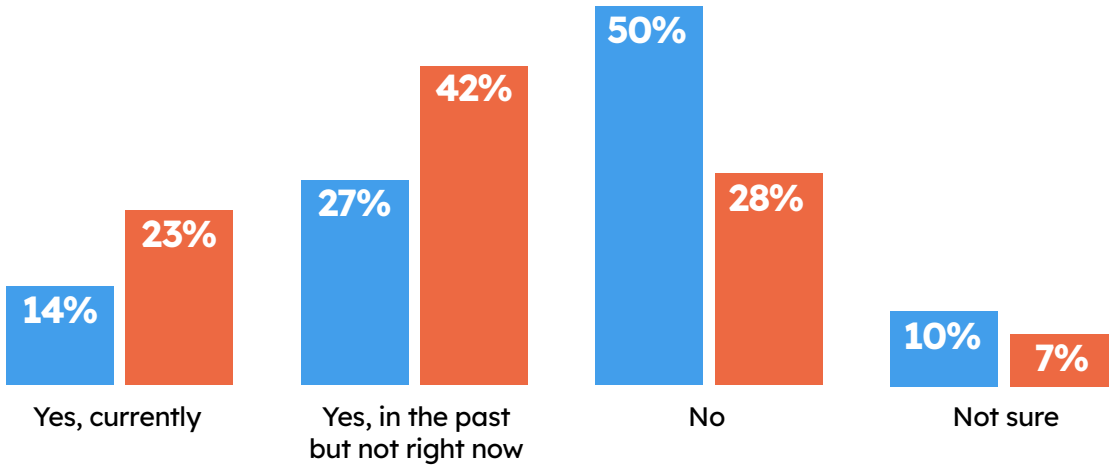


GENDER

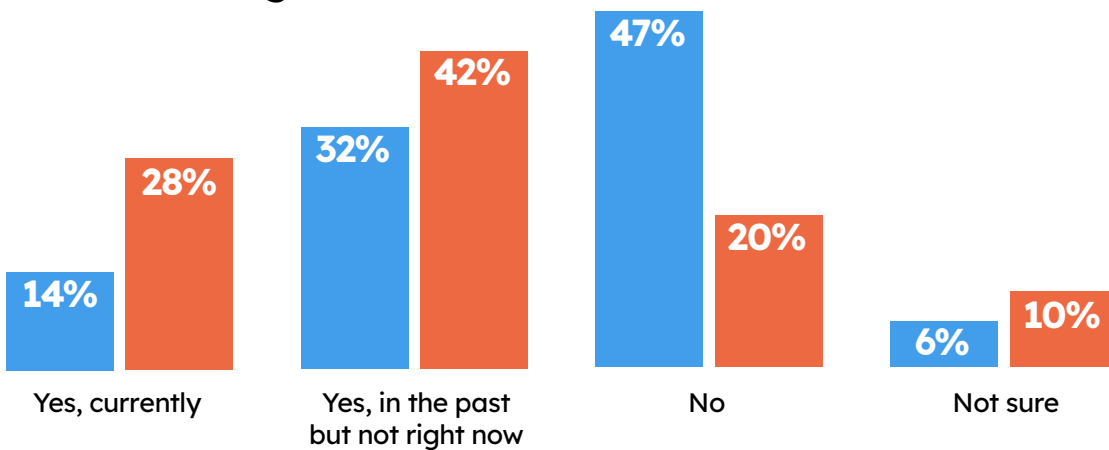
Male Female

MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS ARE MORE PREVALENT AMONG WOMEN

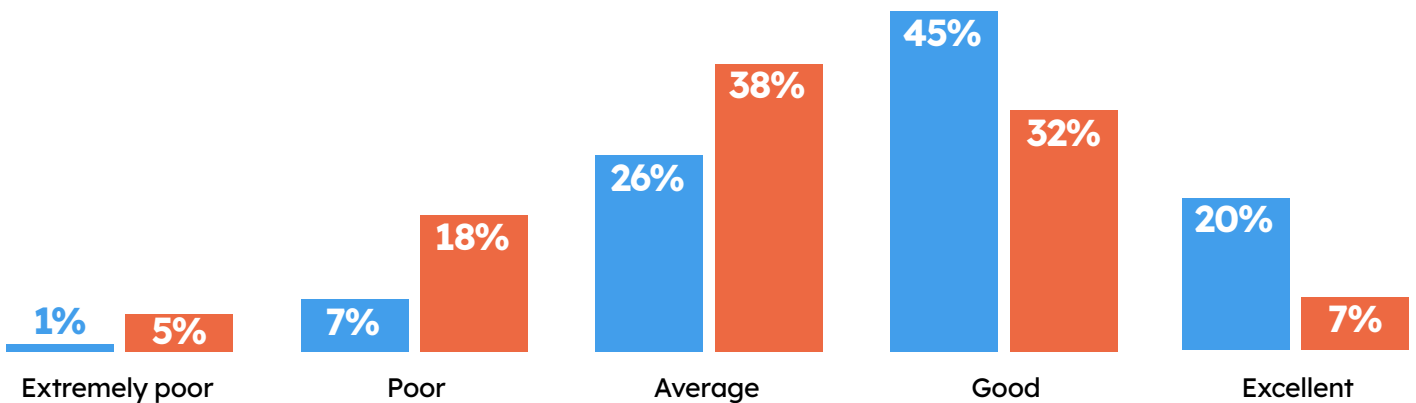
Have you ever/do you suffer with poor mental health generally?



Have you ever/do you suffer with poor mental health whilst working onboard?

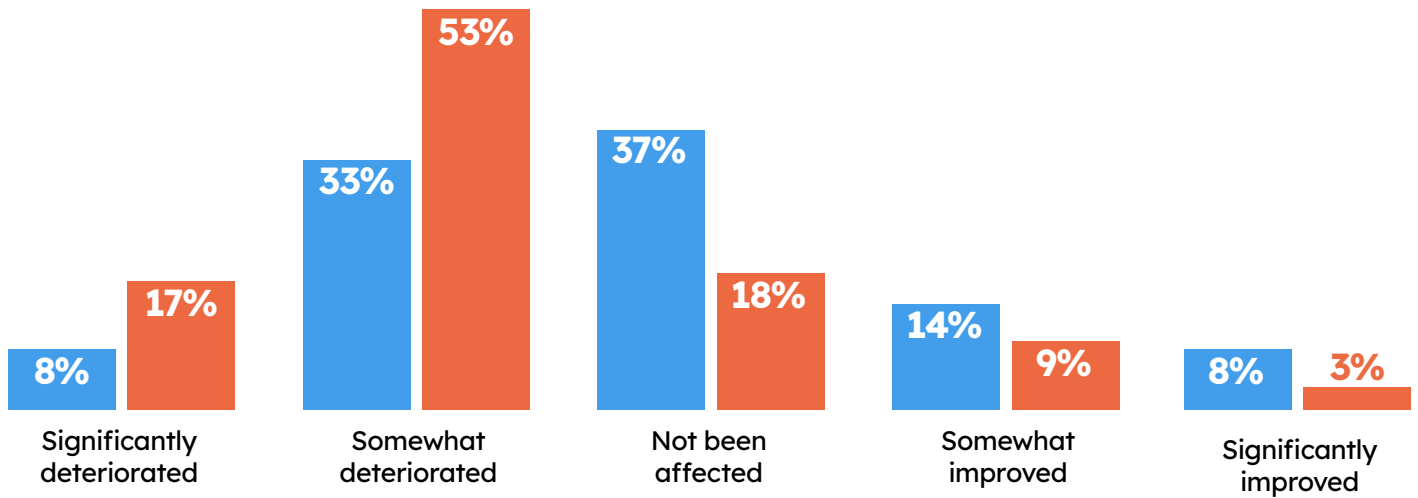


How would you rate your mental health at work?



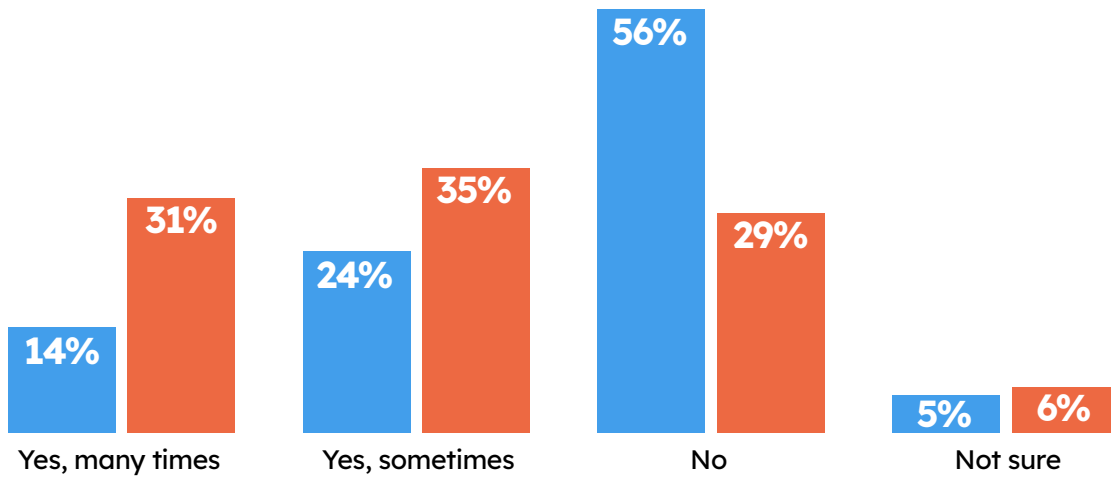
22% of women rate their mental health onboard as **poor** or **extremely poor** compared to men (1% and 7%).

■ Since working in yachting, would you say your mental health has..



20% more females say their mental health has somewhat or significantly deteriorated since joining yachting.

■ Have you ever felt like leaving the yachting sector due to mental health issues?



2/3 of women have considered leaving the yachting sector due to mental health issues compared to 38% of men.



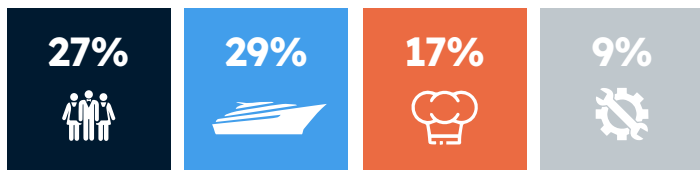
DEPARTMENT

■ Interior
 ■ Deck
 ■ Galley
 ■ Engineering

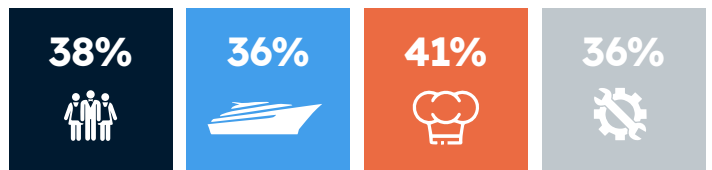
CURRENT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ARE MOST PREVALENT AMONGST INTERIOR AND GALLEY CREW WITH ENGINEERS APPEARING TO FEEL MOST CONTENT AND MENTALLY POSITIVE.

■ Have you ever/do you suffer with poor mental health whilst working onboard?

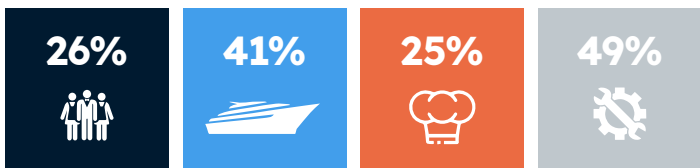
Yes, currently



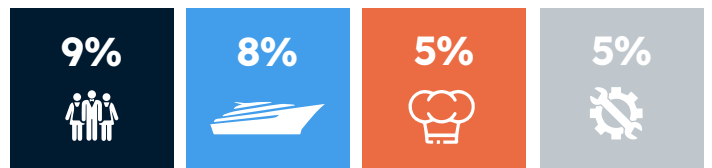
Yes, in the past but not right now



No

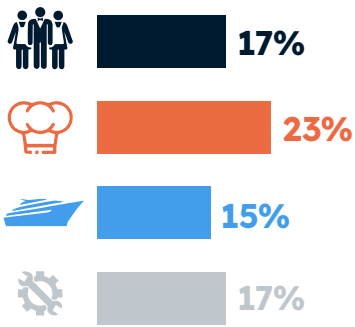


Not sure

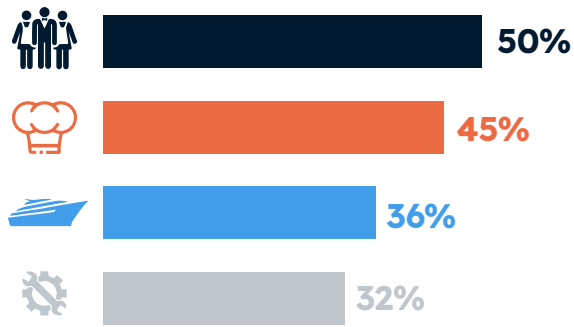


■ **Since working in yachting, would you say your mental health has...**

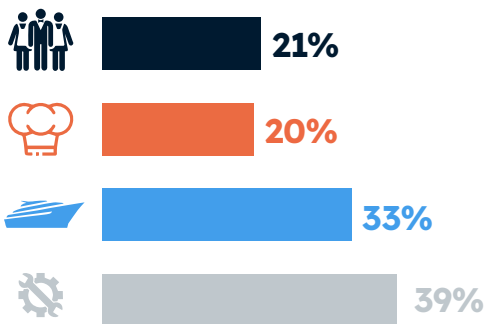
Significantly deteriorated



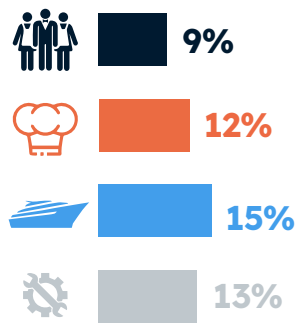
Somewhat deteriorated



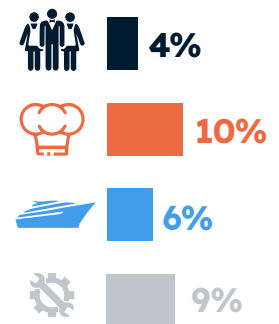
Not been affected



Somewhat improved

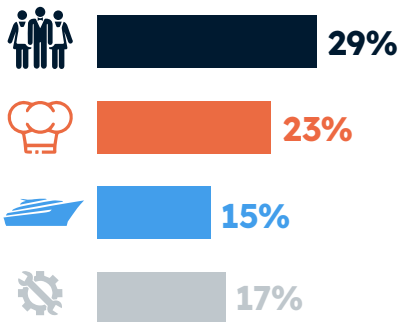


Significantly improved

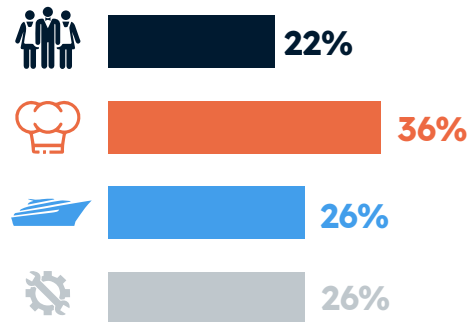


■ **Have you ever felt like leaving the yachting sector due to mental health issues?**

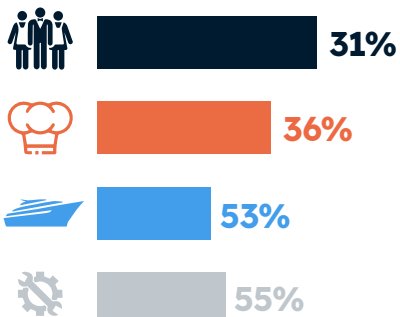
Yes, many times



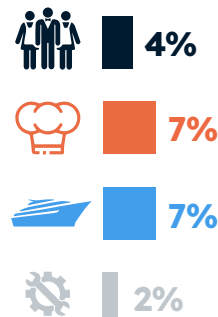
Yes, sometimes



No

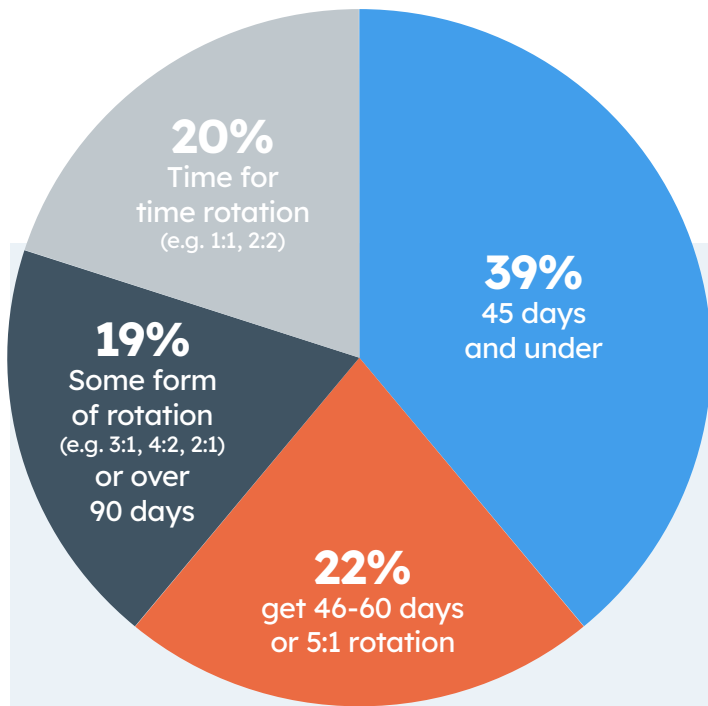


Not sure



LEAVE AND LONGEVITY

THERE IS CLEAR CORRELATION BETWEEN THE LENGTH OF TIME SOMEONE HAS WORKED IN THE YACHTING INDUSTRY, THE AMOUNT OF LEAVE A CREW MEMBER GETS AND THEIR STATE OF MIND.



This demographic is most likely to suffer with poor mental health



22% of people currently suffering with poor mental health get **45 days and under leave** compared to just **9%** of those who get time for time rotation.

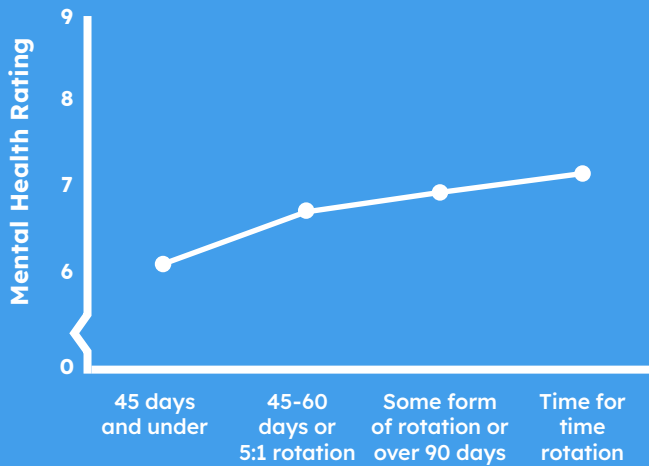


42% of those working in yachting less than 2 years get **45 days and under leave**.



The mental health at work rating **INCREASES** with the amount of leave

(i.e. more leave you have, more positive your mental health whilst onboard).



Leave

18%

of newbies are already suffering currently with poor mental health onboard

28% of them say their mental health has either significantly or somewhat deteriorated.



Also, 34% have already considered leaving the sector



63%

Those who have worked in yachting **5-10 years** have seen their **mental health deteriorate** the most since working in the sector.



Those who have worked onboard for **10+ years** have more leave = **more positive mental health**

SURVEY RESPONDENT COMMENTS

“

“The Captain said if I left, they would prevent me getting a job on any other yacht and give me a bad reference.”

“

“There is poor leadership on every boat I have worked on and the Captains are worse than the guests.”

“

“Sometimes work environments can be toxic and lead to severe unhappiness that I would not call depression but pretty close.”

“

“Self-serving Captains are the least supportive people in this industry. I haven't met a good one yet.”

“

“I wanted to say how refreshing it is to see someone looking into the issue of crew mental health. I have been in the industry for 8 years, and a chief stew for several of those years, and it's a very overlooked and important area in our industry.”

“

“It is indeed very important for the business to make changes and have departments get trained from upper management down to staff and crew so that everyone is equipped to deal with mental illness or mental challenges.”

“

“I am very pleased to see the industry heading in the right direction when it comes to mental health.”

“

“I’m green to the industry, and currently looking for my first role and I have found myself wondering about how the environment is going to affect mental well-being. And so in between job hunting and calling recruiters I have been researching the topic with the idea that I could prepare myself mentally in advance of beginning a new career in a new environment.”

“

“Thank you for the time you have spent organising this. I for one realise there is a very great need within the superyacht industry to attend to the area of leadership and human resources. I feel that the problem is not the individuals on the whole but the lack of any form of professional training in leadership and management for Captains.”

“

“I’ve been a stewardess on a yacht now for nearly two years - I’ve suffered with my mental health for a long time now (before yachting - luckily I have my ways of managing it) but there have been times where it’s been really hard at sea while not having good mental health.”

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on the findings from our 'Mental Health in the Superyacht Sector' survey which was completed by 1,019 crew members across all onboard department, ages, length of service in the sector and nationality.

The survey took place online between 7th September 2021 and 8th October 2021.



QUAY CREW

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



QUAYCREW.COM

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