

COVID-19 EFFECTS ON SEAFARERS' WELL-BEING AFFECTS RETENTION

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Background: Seafarers' mental health and well-being



Aim: Impact of COVID-19 on seafarers' retention



Project: "Effects of COVID-19 panDEmic on sEafarers and shiPping"
(DEEP)



Findings & Conclusions

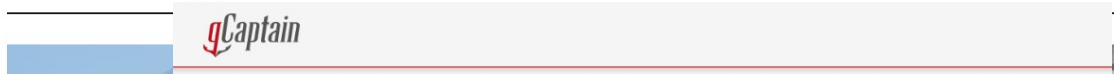
SEAFARERS' MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

	(Nittari et al., 2022)	(Jonglertmontree et al., 2022)	(Brooks & Greenberg, 2022a)	(Brooks & Greenberg, 2022b)	(Li et al., 2022)
Work culture (hierarchical, blame) /Uncaring work environment (abuse, bullying, discrimination, support/care, poor management)	X	X	X	X	X
Fatigue/poor sleep	X		X	X	X
Rest-work time/long working hours	X	X	X		X
Work-related (i.e., shifts, team cohesion, job demands)	X	X	X		X
Isolation from families/support	X		X	X	X
Social environment: Loneliness, lack of social contacts/support on board	X		X	X	X
Length of contract (i.e., long periods on board), contract type, insecurity	X		X	X	X
Physical working environment (e.g., noise, vibration)		X	X		X
Individual factors (age, marital status, physical health, life style)		X	X		X
Lack of job satisfaction, control and autonomy, overcommitment	X		X	X	
Stress	X			X	
Feeling unsafe			X	X	
Lack of recreational facilities					X
Lack of medical assistance facilities/insufficient welfare					X
Industry-specific (piracy, insufficient regulatory protection, chain pressure)					X



Over 600 i-Kiribati trapped seafarers repatriated 2 years after the beginning of the pandemic

by The Editorial Team — May 10, 2022 in Seafarers



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COVID-19's Impact on Seafarer Populations Will be Felt for Years to Come

Editorial
Total Views: 1317 
May 13, 2022



Shipping urged to prepare for potential next pandemic

Covid-19 has had a deleterious effect on seagoing recruitment. Urgent measures need to be carried out now, new report suggests

- Crew change crisis
- Crews moral impact
- Crew welfare
- Crew fatigue
- Increasing safety risks in increased trade
- Retention issues
- Shipping issues exacerbation

COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACT

No uncommon over 11-months onboard (Bailey et al., 2021; Osler, 2020)

No enjoyment of repatriation rights (Dolumbia-Henry, 2020)

Lack of shore leave, exhausting 24/7 workload (Okeleke & Aponjolosun, 2020; Pesel et al., 2020)

Fatigue (Shan, 2022; Pauksztat, Grech, et al., 2022; Zhao, Tang, & Wu, 2023; Zhao, Tang, Ma, et al., 2023) and fatigue-related accidents (Inmarsat, 2022; NSIA, 2022)

Limited/no access to medical care (Pougnnet et al., 2020)

Adverse impacts on financial security (Banta & Pratt, 2022; Devereux & Wadsworth, 2021; Kaur & Joy, 2023; Slišković, 2020)

Impact on seafarers' mental health (Carol-Dekker, 2022; Carrera-Arce et al., 2022; De Beukelaer, 2021; Devereux & Wadsworth, 2022a; Kaptan & Kaptan, 2021; Lucas et al., 2021; Hayes-Mejia & Stafström, 2023; Okeleke & Aponjolosun, 2020; Radic et al., 2020; Russtam Suhrab Ismail et al., 2021; Slišković, 2020; Wong, 2021)

Structural deficiencies in occupational health and safety (Bakhsh, 2021; Clayton, 2021; Shan, 2022)

POST-PANDEMIC

7 Aug 2023 | OPINION



LLOYD'S LIST

Seafarers go hungry as shipping maintains pandemic attitudes

By [Richard Clayton](#)

The latest Seafarers Happiness Index paints a picture of an industry with an ambivalent attitude to seafarer welfare. Crews face...

COVID-19 restrictions ease: allowing movement and a sense of stability (Wijaya, 2023).

Unaddressed essential seafarers' well-being features: extended stays on board, absence of shore leave, excessive burden of work (The Mission to Seafarers, 2023a, 2023b, SEAFiT, 2023).

Peak of chronic issues of excessive workload and fatigue: intensified ship inspection and policy and regulatory updates/revisions (Zhao, Tang, Ma, et al., 2023).

No listening, no learning: Training on Mental Health/well-being is not sufficient.



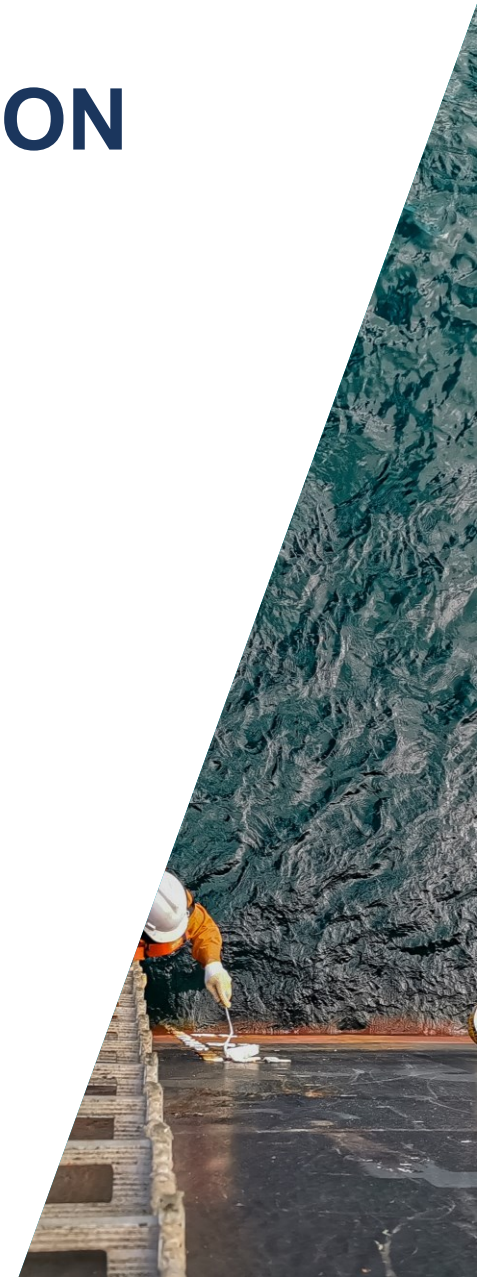
IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SEAFARERS' RETENTION

Unprecedented officer supply shortfall due to deteriorating conditions of crews during the pandemic (BIMCO/ICS, 2021, Drewry, 2023)

Structural imbalance in the labour market (Tang & Bhattacharya, 2021, Tang, 2022)

Choosing to leave seafaring: Job insecurity, stagnant wages/salary decrease, COVID-19 anxiety and work stress, psychological impact, indifferent work environment, job dissatisfaction for British (Devereux & Wadsworth, 2022b), Turkish (Erdem & Tutar, 2022), Indian (Kaur & Joy, 2023), Chinese (Hu, 2020), Vietnamese (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Damage the reputation of the industry and discourage newcomers to seafaring careers (Chen et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023)



“EFFECTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON SEAFARERS AND SHIPPING” (DEEP)



October 2021-December 2023

Sponsor: Government of Sweden

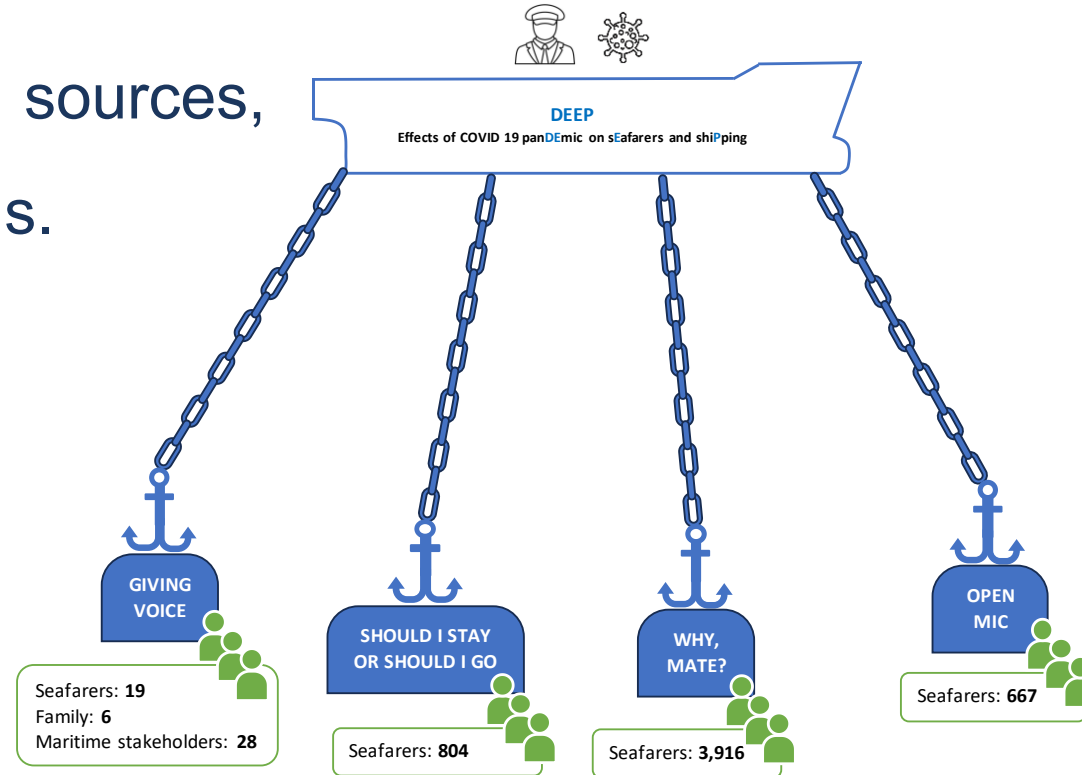
METHODOLOGY

Concurrent model: multiple data sources, quantitative and qualitative methods.

Sequential cross-check:

Pre-study: Indian seafarers (12)

Post-study: Chinese seafarers (16)



SAMPLE DESCRIPTION-QUALITATIVE

Code	Gender	Age	Marital status (children)	Years of seafaring career	Rank	Time since last sailed	Job position	Type of contract	Organization /Company	Type of ship (Flag)	Work status during COVID & Contract extension (months)
S-1	Male	47	Married (Yes)	25	Master	18 months	Marine Surveyor	4 months contract	Ship Management Company	Oil tanker (Panama)	On board (contract extended by 1.5 months)
S-2	Male	43	Married (Yes)	25	Master	Sailing (active seafarer)	Seafarer	3 on/3 off	Shipping Company	Oil tanker (Bahamas)	On board (contract extended by 4 months)
S-3	Male	44	Separated (Yes)	24	Master	Sailing (active seafarer)	Seafarer	4 on/4 off	Ship Management Company	Oil tanker (Marshall Island)	On board (contract extended by 6 months)
S-4	Female	35	Married (Yes)	16	Master	6 months	Looking for job	Permanent	Shipping Company	Bulk carrier (India)	Was at home
S-5	Male	40	Married (Yes)	22	Master	3 months	Marine Supdt.	Duration 5 months, off time- 3/4 months	Ship Management Company	General cargo/Bulk carrier (Hong Kong)	On board (contract extended by 7 months)
S-6	Male	37	Married (Yes)	18	Master	2 months	Training Supdt.	4 months	Ship Management Company	Oil tanker (Marshall Island)	On board (contract extended by 4 months)
S-7	Male	45	Married (No)	19	Chief Engineer	10 months	Looking for job	Permanent	Inspection company	NA	On board (contract extended by 3 months)
S-8	Male	36	Married (Yes)	16	Chief Engineer	21 months	Technical Supdt.	Permanent	Ship Management Company	Oil chemical tanker (Marshall Island)	From office, work from home, Travel and frequent hotel quarantine
S-9	Male	39	Married (Yes)	-	Chief Engineer	1 month	Technical Supdt.	4 on/4 off	Ship Management Company	Oil tanker (Panama)	On board (contract extended by 3 months)
S-10	Female	27	Single (No)	7	Second Officer	Sailing (active seafarer)	Seafarer	Permanent (4 on and time off is maximum 2)	Shipping company	Oil tanker (Bahamas)	On board (contract extended by 3 months)
S-11	Male	34	Single (No)	12	Second Officer	12 months	Looking for job	5 on/5 off	Shipping company	Oil/Chemical tanker (Liberia)	On board (contract extended by 3 months)
S-12	Male	41	Married (Yes)	18	Rating	10 months	Trying business	9 months contract	Ship Management Company	Bulk carrier (Hong Kong)	On board (contract extended by 2 months)



- **COVID-19 impacts on well-being and retention. "That fear of getting stuck on board has probably left a scar which I am not able to get rid of so far."**

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories (Frequencies)*
Reasons to become a seafarer	Financial/family support	Financial stability at an early age (10)
	Adventure/travelling	Adventure and travelling (6)
	Maritime culture	Growing up near coastal city (3) Family or community influence (1)
Motivation to remain in the profession	Financial	Monetary considerations (8)
	Professional	Career growth (5) Professional pride and accomplishments (4)
	Personal	Job flexibility-time with family (3)
Changes in shipping since career started	Negative-Workload and pressure	Increased workload and pressure (12)
		Increased paperwork (12)
		Reduced manpower (12)
	Negative-Psychosocial	Increased inspections at ports and terminals (12)
		Implementation of new regulations (4)
	Negative-Personal and social	Restrictions/no shore leave (12)
		No socializing onboard (8)
		Dry ship policies (2)
	Negative-Psychological	Lack of respect, harassment and bullying at ports and criminalization of seafarers (8)
		Positive changes

Impact of COVID-19 on personal and professional life	Psychological	Psychological-big impact (10)
	Personal	Personal- delayed sign offs and no shore leave (10) Personal-feeling of hopeless (8) Personal-Traumatic experience (4)
	Social	Social- reconsider seafaring career (9) Social-realization that seafarers are not important (4)
Impact of COVID-19 on quit		Yes, the pandemic influenced (11) No, the pandemic had no influence (1)
Reasons to quit	Personal	Spend more time with family (8) Having attained financial stability (1)
	Professional	Stagnant salaries and no career growth (6)
		Excessive stress and workload (5)
		Difficult as a female officer (1) Control/exploitation by company (2)
	Social	Inspections (1) Social isolation on board (1)
	Effects of COVID-19	Impact of COVID restrictions (2)
What COVID-19 reveals	Personal-lack of recognition	Seafarers are inconsequential (12)
	Psychosocial	Exploitation by authorities/companies (12)
	Institutional shortcomings	IMO and international organizations lack commitment/power (4)
	Organizational support (positive)	Companies tried to help in sign off (3)
Recommendation of seafaring profession	Yes	Yes, will explain pros and cons and decision rests with the person (8)
	No	No, will discourage (3) No, will discourage unless from under-privileged family (1)
		No, will not recommend to females (1)

*"It affected me a lot while I was onboard, it was the biggest **trauma** of my sea career. I had crew members onboard on the verge of **breakdown**, cases where one or two guys were getting suicidal, trying to **cause self-harm**. I was myself going through a feeling of helplessness not knowing what to do. COVID - 19, from the work point of view, gave me a lot of trauma and probably was responsible for me **not thinking of going back to sea**." (S-1)*

"It really affected me a lot, maybe if it was not for COVID - 19 maybe I would have been sailing till now." (S-8)

*"It has affected us a lot, there were no sign offs, and we realized that **we are not important to anyone**." (S-12)*

*"So, and I understand from conversations that the job is quite difficult and **more and more unmanageable**, in terms of workload and how seafarers are treated. So yes, I guess I understand the wanting to quit, or to find a shore job, particularly after the pandemic and fear. I'm supportive of that." (seafarer's wife, quit after COVID)*

*"They've seen how they are treated, some of them actually experienced the worst treatment in their lives. So it caused trauma to some of them. [...] It's not in the care of the entire industry to the seafaring profession, if they feel that they are just treated like just the thing that can be **discarded** when you're no longer important or valuable." (Chief of Staff, Maritime Administration)*

*"Because of seeing the **unfair treatment** of seafarers have received during the pandemic [...], young people in countries that offer decent living standards **will not be willing to take up the seafarer job** in the future because we have seen the way seafarers have suffered and **publicized their sufferings**." (Seafarers Committee Secretary, Shipowners Association)*

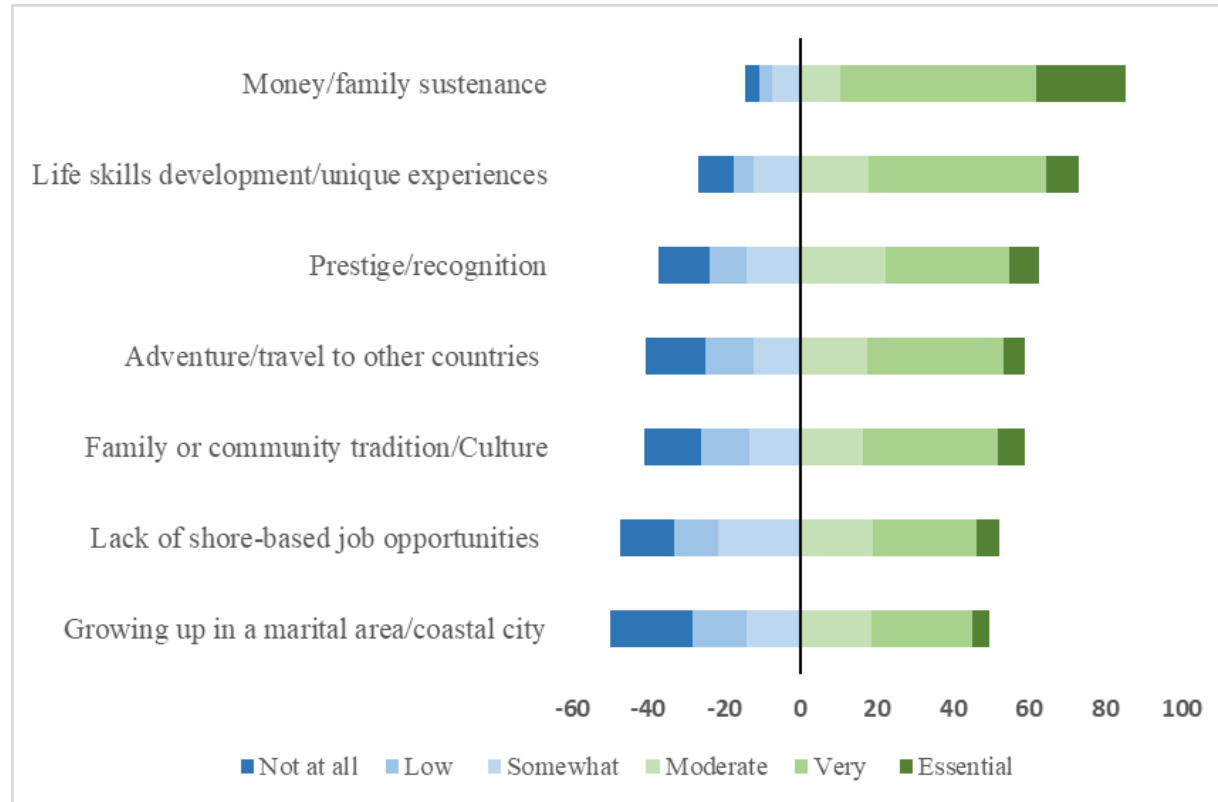
*"In a general trend when we are having a conversation with the seafarers, what we come to know that it is not going to become a good industry, if such kind of treatment continues. [...] In fact, to be very frank, we had many seafarers during this period, they have left this career and they have joined some other industry and **they don't want to come and they don't regret they don't want to come**." (Marine Personnel Manager, Ship management)*

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION-QUANTITATIVE

Sample Characteristics	n (%) or mean (SD) (Total N=804)
Age, years	36 (8.6)
Gender	
Male	776 (96.5)
Female	27 (3.4)
Prefer not to say	1 (0.1)
Nationality	
Indonesia	396 (49.3)
China	196 (24.4)
India	104 (12.9)
Philippines	83 (10.3)
Other	25 (2.8)
Seafaring experience, years	12 (8)
Current/latest rank on board	
Officer	684 (85.2)
Rating	67 (8.2)
Cadet	43 (5.3)
Other	9 (1)
Department on ship	
Deck	524 (65.1)
Engine	273 (15.5)
Other	4 (0.4)

Type of ship	
Tanker Ship	245 (30.5)
Bulk Carrier/General Cargo	204 (25.4)
Tug	67 (8.3)
Container Ship	52 (6.4)
Barge	50 (6.2)
Passenger / Cruise Ship	34 (4.2)
Multi-purpose vessel	26 (3.2)
Offshore Ships	28 (3.5)
RO-RO	14 (1.7)
Special Purpose Ship	13 (1.5)
Other (e.g., fruit carrier, car carrier etc.)	37 (4.6)
Type of ship register	
Indonesia	294 (36.6)
China	137 (17)
Singapore	83 (10.3)
Panama	59 (7.3)
Hong Kong (China)	36 (4.5)
Marshall Island	26 (3.2)
Liberia	23 (2.9)
Malta	17 (2.1)
Bahamas	13 (1.6)
Malaysia	12 (1.5)
India	11 (1.4)
Other-National Registry	69 (9)
Other- Open Registry	20 (2.1)
Current work status	
On board	406 (45.5)
On leave	228 (28.4)
Out of contract/Unemployed	88 (10.9)
Working ashore	61 (7.6)
Other	21 (2.6)

SURVEY-RESULTS



How important were the following factors in your decision to become a seafarer?

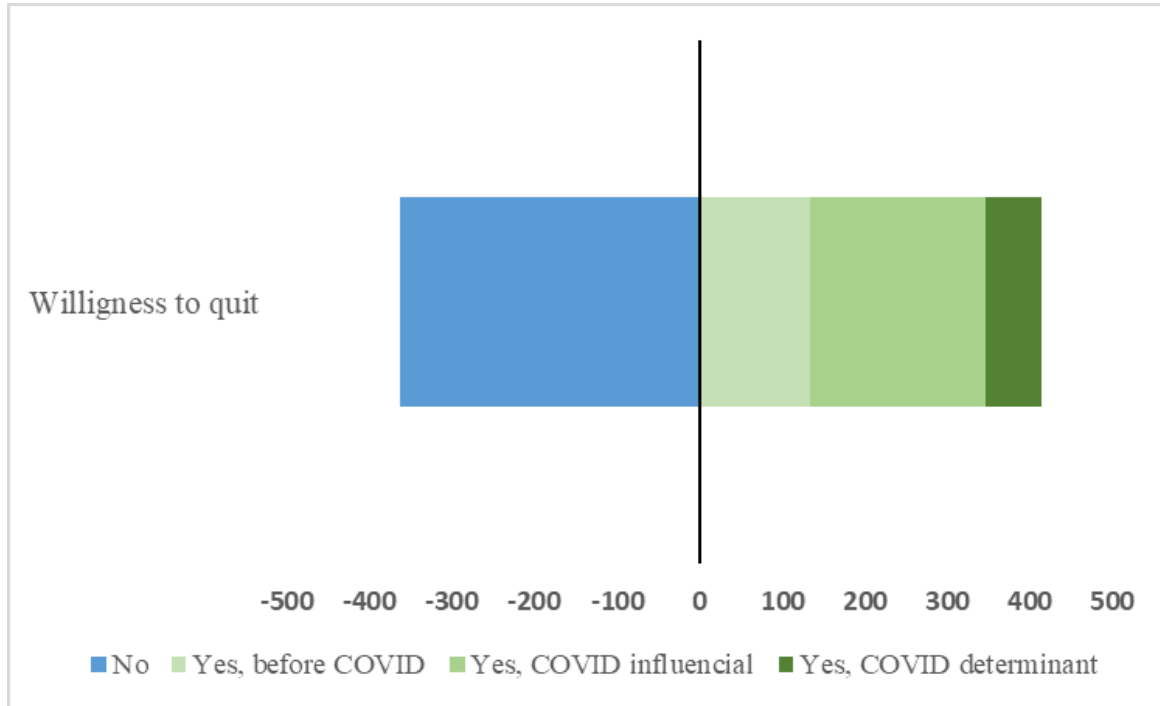
“The reason for choosing the seafaring career was to earn good money [...].”
(S-6)

“I hail from a small town which didn’t have much in terms of higher education unlike today, so we were left with two options, either Defence or Merchant navy.” (S- 3)

“Pride of commanding a vessel where I am in absolute command, the decision maker, [...] motivated me.”
(S-1)

SURVEY-RESULTS

1. Intention to quit



Has your experience during COVID-19 made you reconsider your seafaring career/explore an alternative career to sea

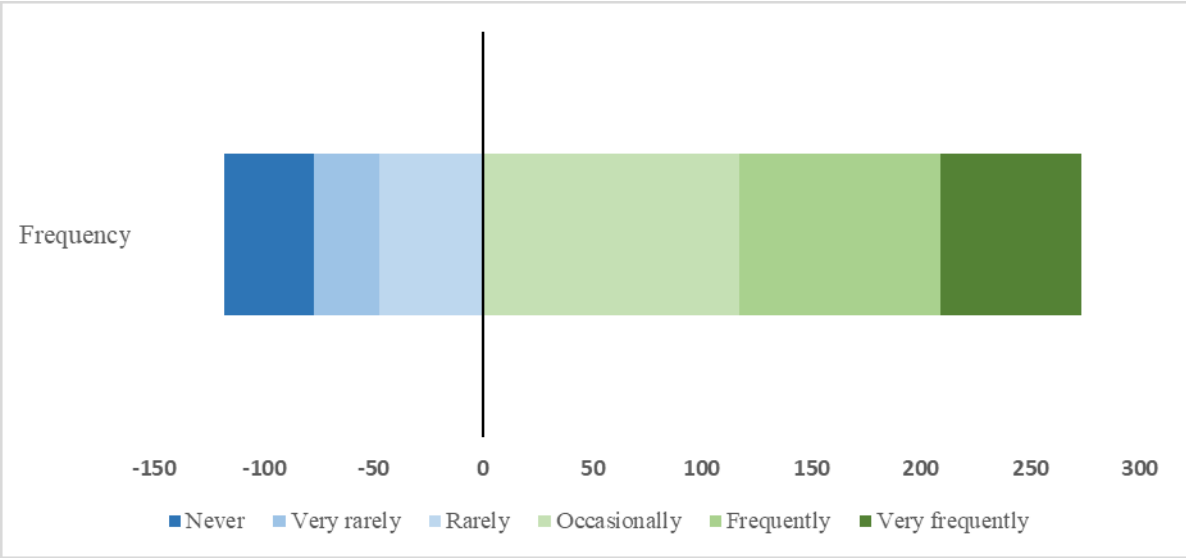
“The way the seafarers have been treated during the pandemic has definitely influenced me to look into options to quit active sailing job.”
(Captain, LPG tanker)

“Not only me I think most seafarers feel seafaring has degraded over the years, it's no more fun to be on ship is a lot of work a lot of stress. And COVID time was kind of final nail in the coffin, you know, saying that okay, enough.” (Captain, chemical tanker)

“It has made me look for alternatives, had it not been for COVID-19, maybe I would have been a chief mate by now.” (Second officer, tanker)

SURVEY-RESULTS

2. Frequency of thinking about quitting

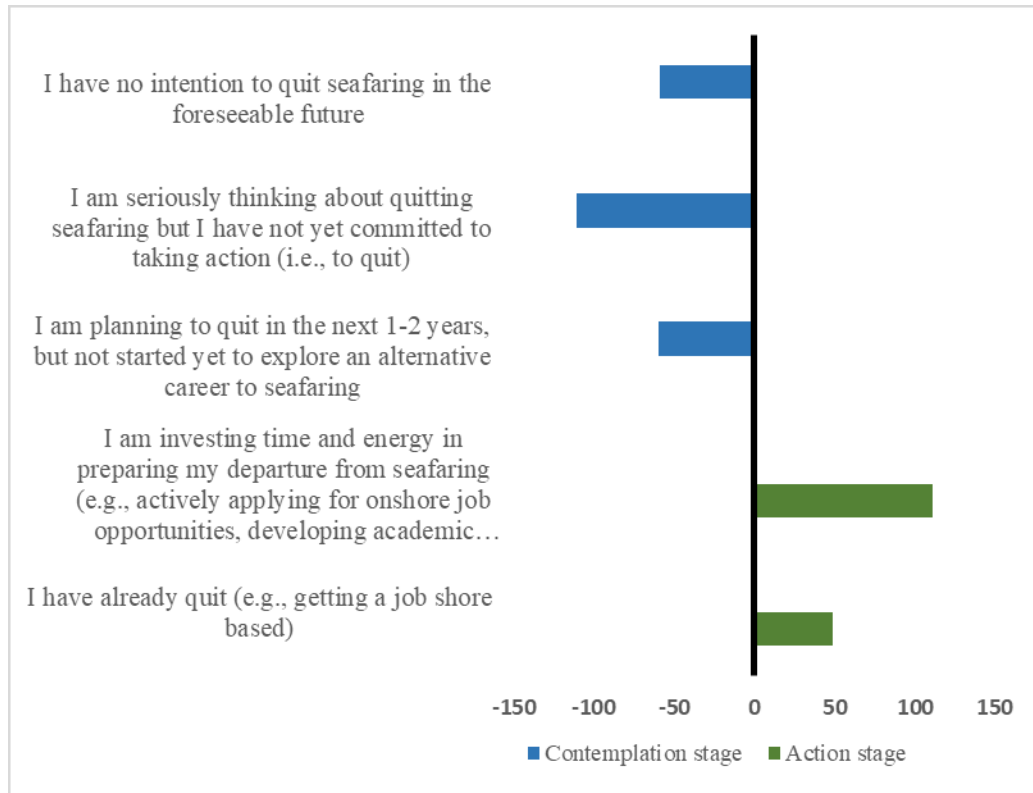


How frequently do you think about quitting seafaring?



SURVEY-RESULTS

3. Close to quitting (stage of change)

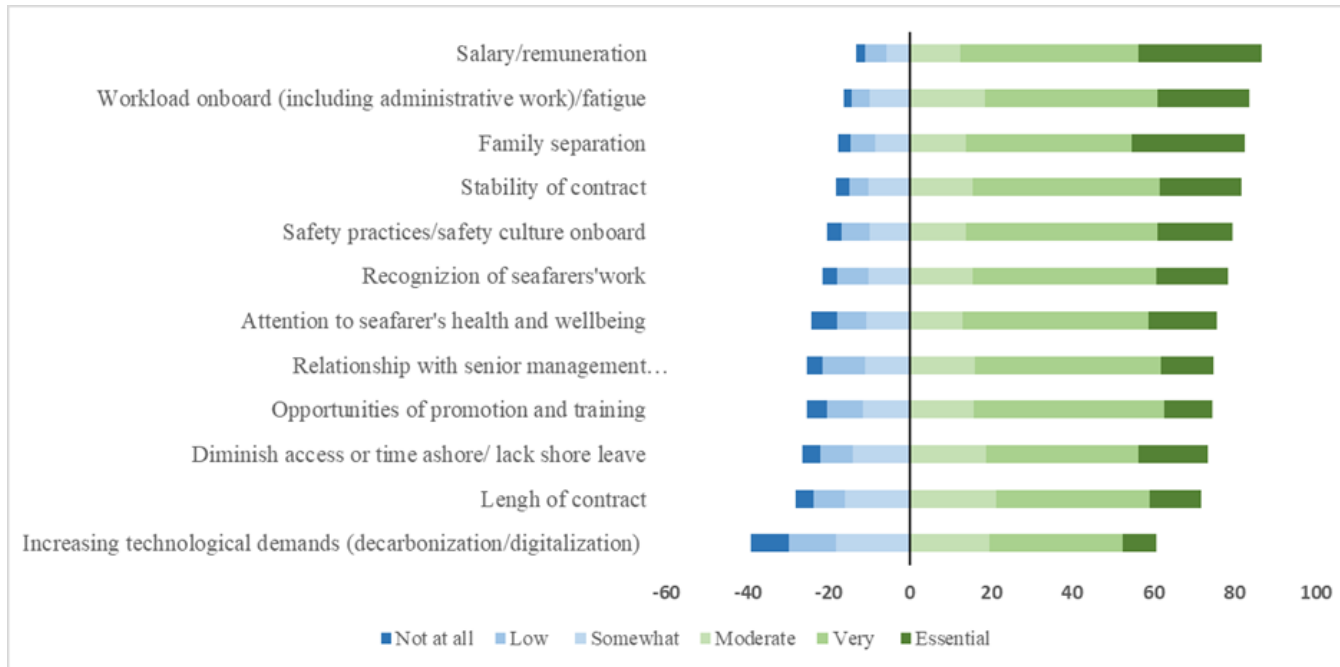


171 (39.1%) were thinking seriously or planning to quit in the next 1-2 years, they had yet to start to put practical efforts into the departure, 160 seafarers (36.6%) were already investing time and energy in preparing for their departure or had already quit.

“I actively explore and take action, but economic pressure makes me return to sailing.” (Second officer, bulk carrier)

Concerning reconsidering/quitting your seafaring career, choose the one that fits best your current state.

SURVEY-RESULTS



How important are the following factors in your decision to reconsider/quit your seafaring career?

- 1) salaries,
- 2) family separation,
- 3) excessive workload and paperwork,
- 4) pressure from the office and frequent new regulations,
- 5) fatigue and insufficient manning.

CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

- (1) Increase ILO basic wage and index all wages to inflation,
- (2) Review working time regulations,
- (3) Define and respect maximum continuous periods onboard,
- (4) Ensure holiday periods, allowing effective family-work balance,
- (5) Establish long-term and trustful relationships between seafarers and their employers,
- (6) Balance workload with crew size, considering the bureaucratization of ship operation,
- (7) Promote support for seafarers' family,
- (8) Ascertain occupational safety and health and well-being in shipping,
- (9) Recognize seafarers as key workers and enact national legislations accordingly

Thank you!

