

▶ **HOW HEALTHY
ARE YOUR CREW?**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ In a survey of 1,211 crew, 64 per cent of respondents reported that they had experienced a mental health issue while working onboard superyachts.
- ▶ Mental health support is not just for use in a crisis and is most effective before an issue has escalated.
- ▶ Mental health symptoms are complex; the symptoms that a crew member may present may not correlate to the perceptions of what a mental health issue looks like.
- ▶ A holistic approach towards physical and mental health is one the best ways of ensuring crew mental resilience.
- ▶ An effective education and treatment plan for mental health onboard a superyacht must have a baseline from which to measure progress and that may anticipate issues before they become critical.



► INTRODUCTION

Mental health-related issues are on the rise, irrespective of the industry. In a 2020 survey of 1,211 superyacht crew:

- 64 per cent reported that they had experienced a mental health issue working on board.
- Of those, 38 per cent cited anxiety, 29 per cent depression and 27 per cent self-esteem issues.
- While 72 per cent of the respondents felt that their employer was considerate of concerns, there is a significant bridge between feeling support and using it.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated this upward trend. Few industries have felt the multi-layered implications of a global shutdown like the marine industry.

The collateral damage for superyacht operations that came with lockdowns is hard to quantify. The increased isolation onboard, disrupted relationships with physical activity, and prolonged separation from family and friends have all compounded the stress levels placed on crew mental health.

Many superyachts do not operate with a large surplus of mental resilience; the responsibility is higher than ever to provide effective education and support for mental health-related issues.

Data Source:
www.faststream.com/insights/the-superyacht-survey-2020

► CREATE A BASELINE, IMPLEMENT A STRATEGY

If any significant company were asked to create a new product or system that required investment of time and resources that can drastically affect recruitment, retention, and well-being, the expectation would be for a detailed 12-month plan and measurable metrics of success. However, when the focus is mental health - across all industries - this accountability is often abandoned. Many companies will have the financial resources to create a mental health and wellbeing programme, but no formal strategy exists.

The ad-hoc implementation of webinars, or guidance for a helpline are what can be termed by Dr Rodrigo Rodriguez-Fernandez as 'Fruits and Yoga systems'. E.g. when asked if they have a system in place, they can reply, 'Yes, haven't you seen the fruit bowl? And don't forget, we do yoga once a month!'. These small steps may work as part of a wider plan, but in isolation, they are insufficient and fail to meet the demands of high stress, remote work such as the superyacht industry.

The first step to any effective system is to identify a behavioural baseline for a crew member. What was their behaviour like at the start of the season, compared to now?

When comparing to a baseline, it is possible to describe why these behaviours appear bizarre or abnormal, putting a well-structured informed behavioural blueprint in place. That can become the superyacht's North Star for improving health and well-being.

Consulting with mental health professionals to create a survey that establishes this baseline and identifies where crew are hurting is the first step. Factors such as sleep, anxiety, eating disorders, lack of exercise, smoking/drinking habits etc. can be identified, which then allows captains and management to focus on the priority areas and implement a strategy to address them.

The strategy can then lead to forming a list or 'menu' of activities and services that the crew can use, discretely and anonymously if needed, to help with their specific requirements.

With the implementation of the survey system, coupled with the presence of external tools, like therapy and emotional support, a superyacht can both offer the assistance needed and have a measurable metric to gauge the mental health of the crew and, crucially, identify issues before they become critical.





► CIRCUIT BREAKERS

Systems such as MedAire's Emotional Support Service provide a tool that is part of a more comprehensive system of mental resilience training and support for crew and should be treated as one of many circuit breakers that can diffuse a situation before it reaches a crisis point.

Less than half of vessels that MedAire serve have implemented emotional support, yet despite this they have seen a steady increase in uptake over the past year. The service is anonymous and allows crew to speak to a trained therapist, without having to get the captain's approval - which can often be a hindrance in reaching out.

As Rodrigo Rodriguez-Fernandez, Global Medical Director of workplace wellness at International SOS summarises - "Mental health awareness and training are like brushing your teeth; If you brush your teeth once a month, then your teeth will probably fall out. You need to brush your teeth every single day. Likewise, you need a mental health programme that that is always there the whole year, not just when things get rough, but it has to be accessible to everyone continuously."

"Mental health awareness and training are like brushing your teeth; If you brush your teeth once a month, then your teeth will probably fall out. You need to brush your teeth every single day. Likewise, you need a mental health programme that is always there the whole year, not just when things get rough, but it has to be accessible to everyone continuously."

RODRIGO RODRIGUEZ-FERNANDEZ
GLOBAL MEDICAL DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL SOS

► MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY PRESENT AS

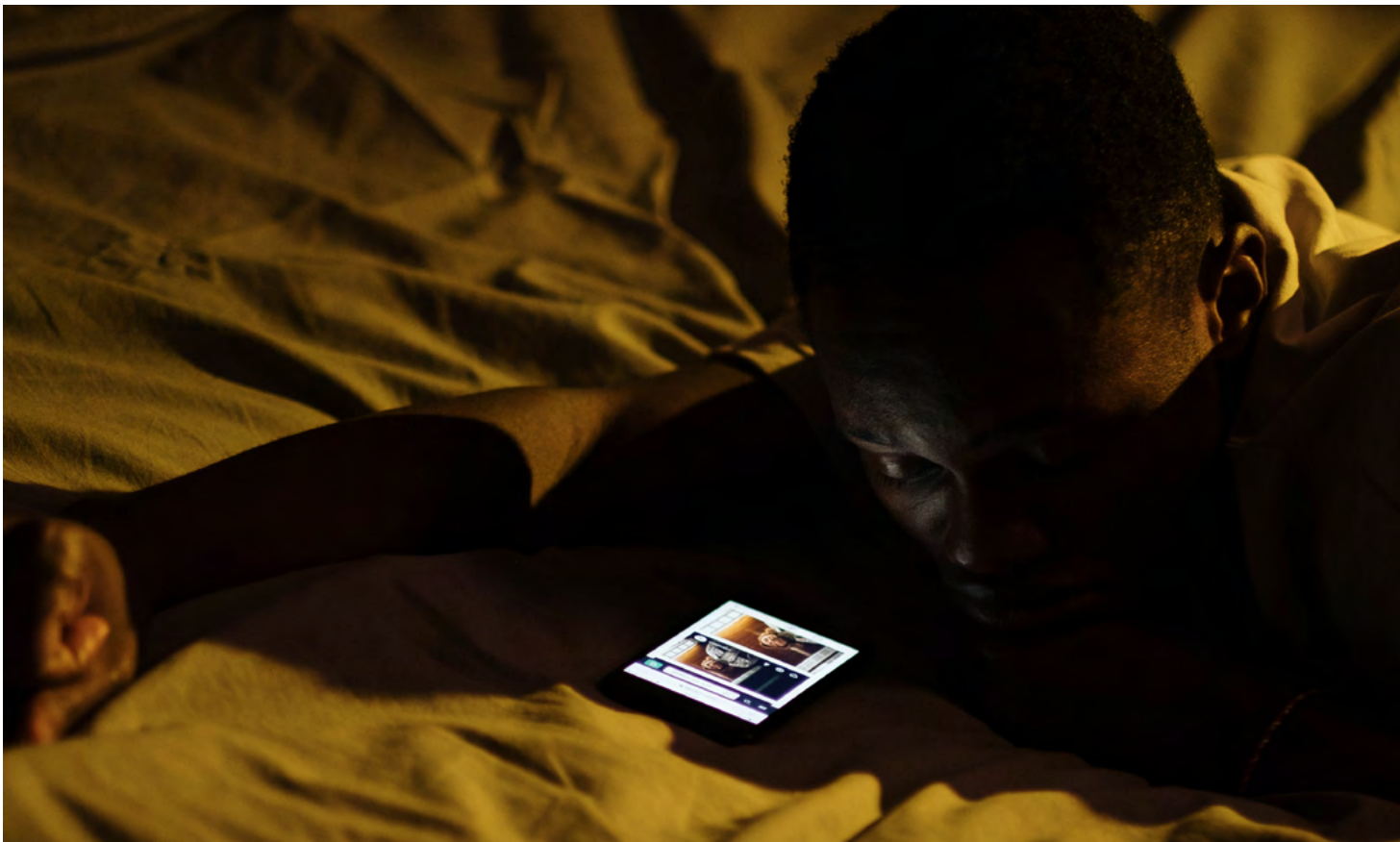
Mental health symptoms manifest themselves in unique ways. Taken in isolation, and especially on board a superyacht, any one symptom can be hard to correlate with a mental health issue correctly.

The symptoms most often associated with mental health concerns are; chest pain, gastrointestinal disorders, headaches and insomnia. And are very often reported and treated as such. Because these symptoms may then be identified in isolation and addressed, a treatment cycle may not get to the bottom of the broader mental health issue and provides only a short-term positive effect for the crew member: the pressure valve is released a little, but the deeper problem is not identified; merely the symptom has been addressed. Without engagement with specialist mental health support, these issues may remain miscategorised and mistreated.

There is an observed tendency, when speaking to a medical doctor, to allow the conversation to stay focussed on these outward, medical symptoms, not addressing the mental health issues. Often, a crew member, or a colleague speaking on their behalf, know that something is wrong but will reflexively leave the conversation focussed on 'medical' issues when talking to a medical doctor.

Where individuals may be more likely to seek medical attention to treat symptoms, it is advantageous to have a comprehensive service available that can provide a holistic approach to the solution. Identifying a requirement for treatment and support of a person's mental health is a key skill that medical teams specialising in superyacht and other remote environments are trained to pick up. You cannot treat mental and physical health in isolation; the two are inextricably linked.

Specialist mental health providers can tease out this information in a calming and constructive way that does not exacerbate the situation nor alienate the person exhibiting the symptoms.



► CONCLUSIONS

The pressure that crew feel while working onboard a superyacht was high before the pandemic. The more minor but vital interactions between superyachts and limited time ashore have been stripped back even more drastically than an ordinarily busy season would dictate.

The operational profile of a typical superyacht presents a set of mental health considerations that are unique. Associations with superficially similar industries such as offshore oil and gas can only offer a limited comparison level. Superyacht crew have mental health stress points and concerns that are both varied and highly specific, both to the individual and the superyacht itself.

A responsible and successful superyacht should have a comprehensive system in place to support its crew. Starting with a baseline of individual-specific behaviour to measure against, built with a network of tools to implement, under the guidance of mental health experts. It is a challenging subject with confronting issues, but there are support structures that exist and so the challenge now is ensuring higher utilisation rates and earlier intervention.

ABOUT MEDAIRE

MedAire, an International SOS Company, is the world's leading medical assistance and travel safety service, used by over 50% of the world's superyachts.

For over 35 years we have been ensuring that owners, captains, crew and guests are prepared, capable and confident during medical and travel safety incidents, 24/7/365.

This expertise goes into everything we do, from: telemedical support, medical kits, training and emotional support.

Find out more at www.medaire.com/yachts

For more information on our products and services contact MedAire:

INFO@MEDAIRE.COM

NORTH & SOUTH AMERICA +1 480 333 3700

EUROPE +44 1252 517 951

ASIA PACIFIC +65 6330 9534

MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA +97142536020

EXPERT CARE, **EVERYWHERE.**