

Unlocking the Drivers of Seafarer Mental Wellbeing

Loss Prevention Webinar

Capt. Charles Chong

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Speakers

Loss Prevention Webinar – 24 February 2026



Capt. Charles Chong
Associate Director,
Loss Prevention (Master Mariner)

Master Mariner, with 16 years of seagoing experience, of which two were in command. Before joining the Club, he worked with a large ship management companies as Marine Supt, DPA and CSO for shipping company with AHTS, passenger ferries, tankers, and numerous offshore vessel types. His subsequent shore-based experience included ships operations and as a marine surveyor, carrying out investigations into marine incidents, cargo claims, damage, and safety surveys, many for International Group P&I Clubs.

Charles joined the Club in 2022.



Dr. Joanna Eugenia Bakouni
Learning & Development Manager
Maersk Training

Dr. Joanna is the Learning and Development Manager at Maersk Training, where she has overseen the maritime training portfolio since March 2024. She brings extensive industry experience from her previous roles as HR and Training Manager in shipping, complemented by hands-on exposure to Operations and HSEQ, giving her a deep appreciation of the operational realities seafarers face. Academically, she holds a PhD in Organizational Behaviour and Leadership, along with an MSc in Psychology (Occupational Pathway), an MSc in Human Resources Management, and diplomas in Adult Education and Maritime Operations. In addition to her industry work, she actively teaches at university level on HR-related subjects and is a frequent speaker at academic conferences and maritime industry forums.

Unlocking the Drivers of Seafarer Mental Wellbeing

What is Mental Health and Mental Illness?

Mental health Definition by the World Health Organization (WHO)

- A state of wellbeing in which the individual realises their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contribution to their community.

Mental illness Definition by Singapore Association of Mental Health

- Mental illness is a disturbance of the mind that impairs the way we think, feel and behave. Mood and anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses.

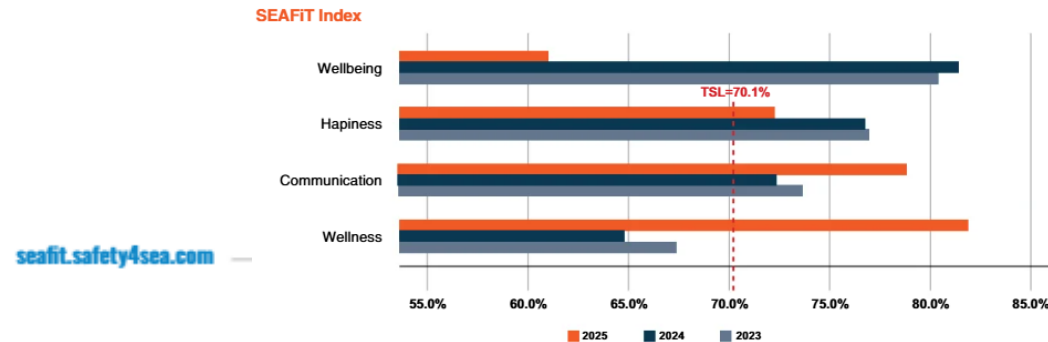


Source: [Movendi International – World Health Organization](#)

Unlocking the Drivers of Seafarer Mental Wellbeing

SeaFiT Crew Survey Report 2025

2025 SEAFiT Index - a measure of overall wellness – stands at 70.1%, a slight decline from 2024’s 72.5% - a clear downward trend in seafarer wellbeing



SUMMARY

Rank	Mental health Barriers by order of importance (TSL=70.1 %)	SL%
1	My healthcare does not cover mental health issues	57.4%
2	There is no information on the symptoms associated with mental health issues	58.0%
3	There is no information on strategies to cope with mental health issues	60.5%
4	There is no information/ access to a mental health app	61.2%
5	There is no access to a mental health service onboard	62.6%
6	There is no time to relax and recharge onboard	63.4%
7	While on duty, I do things that I do not like to do	68.3%
8	There is no privacy onboard to talk to someone	69.1%
9	There is no crew member that I can talk to and understand me	70.0%
10	I do not get on well with my fellow crew members	72.4%

Table 2: Key Mental Health Barriers of life onboard

Source: Seafit.Safety4Sea

Unlocking the Drivers of Seafarer Mental Wellbeing

Traditional Focus Onboard

- High workload
 - Fatigue, long hours and irregular sleep cycles
 - Extended time away from home and families
 - Isolation due to limited connectivity
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- As Club's Loss Prevention team, we often interact with Members
 - Nowadays, we find seafarer mental wellbeing is facing more complex psychosocial challenges beyond fatigue or isolation



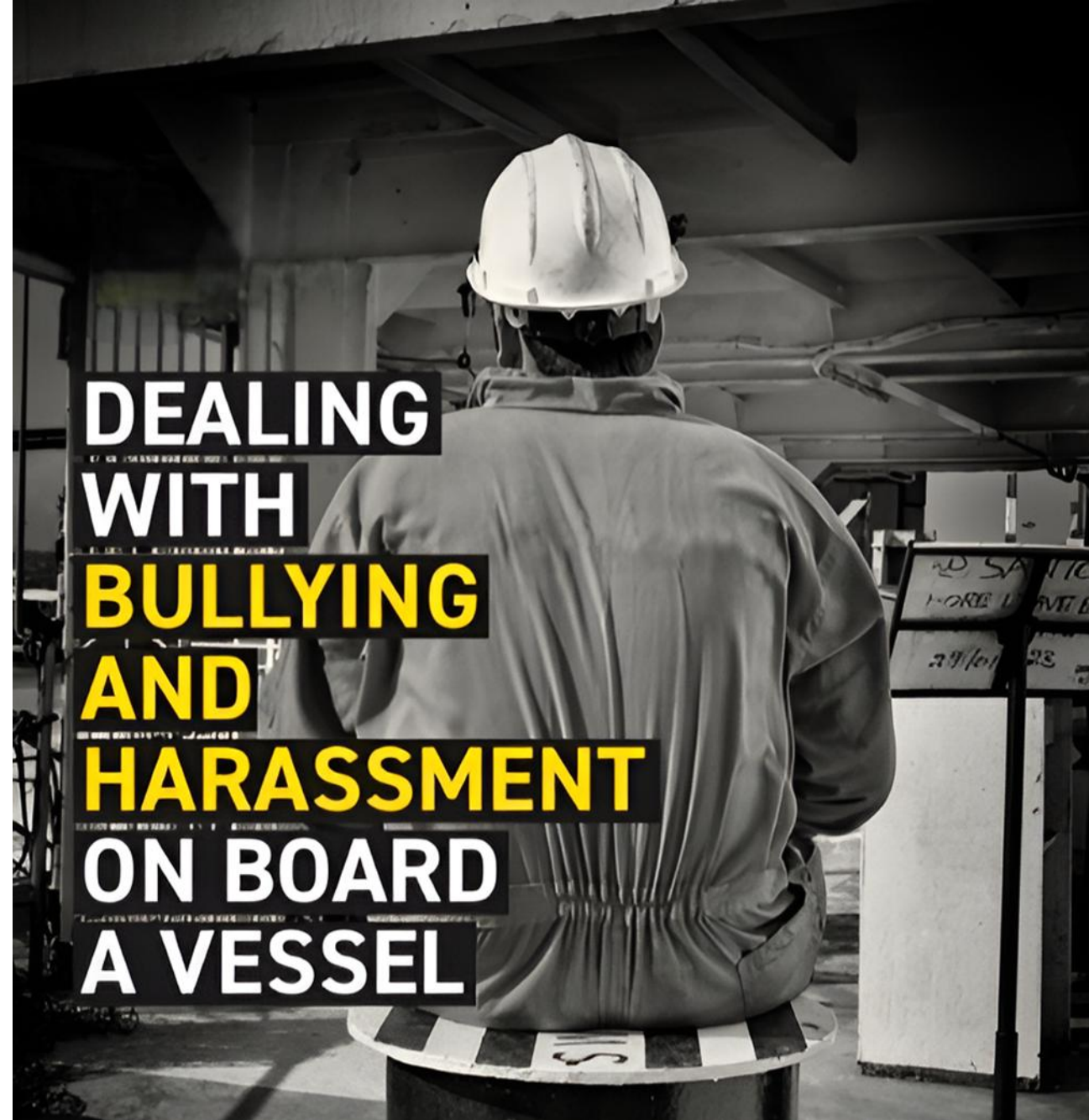
New Trends – COVID-19 Pandemic

- During COVID-19 pandemic, seafarers feel the stress, uncertainty and could be emotionally taxing
- Back then, shore leave is one aspect that seafarers are often deprived of, long contract period and then job insecurity after signing off
- Although crew change has stabilised since the disruptions of COVID-19, the effect still affects our crew



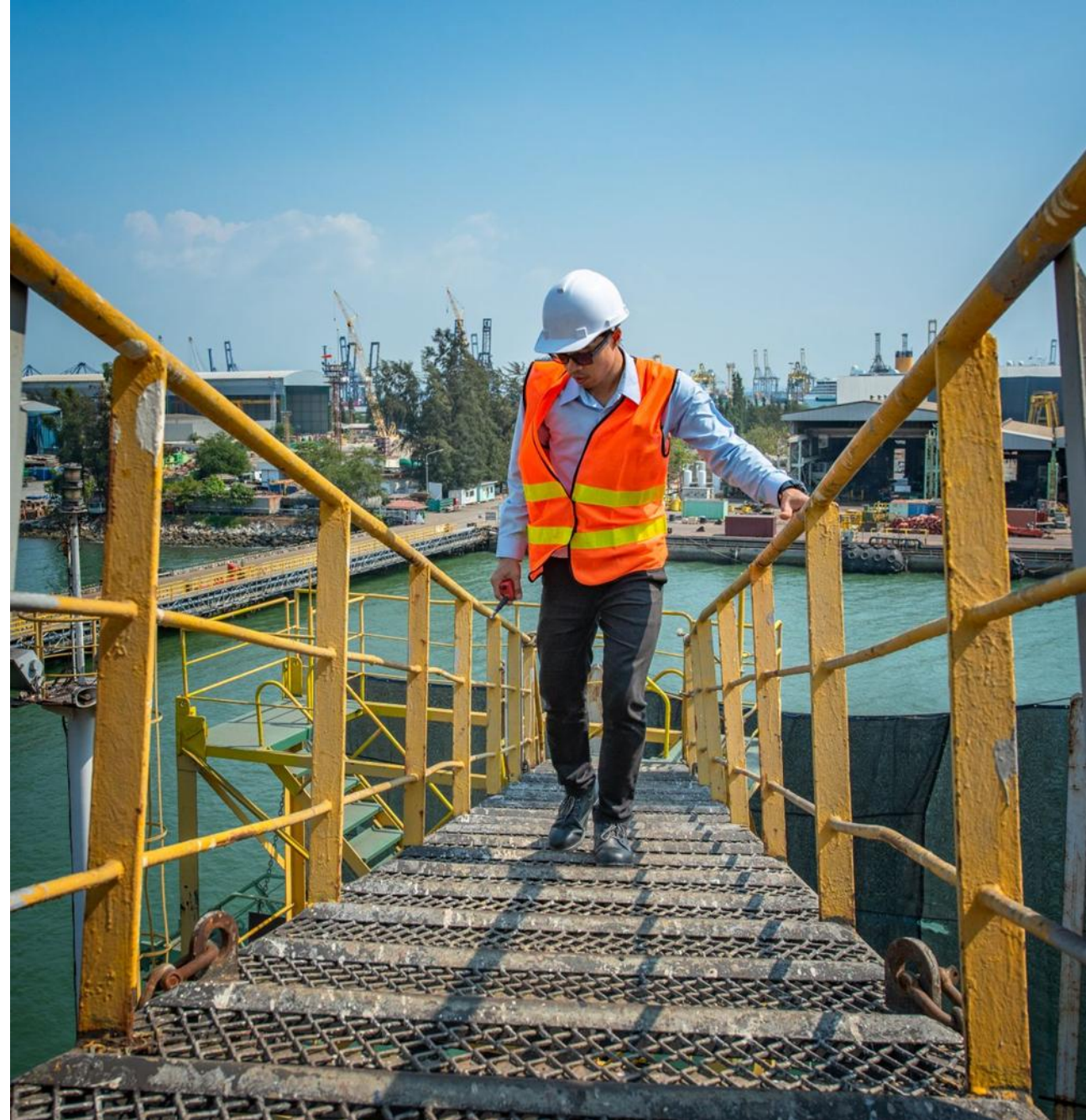
Newer Trends

- Mental wellbeing influences operational safety, crew communication, trust and reporting behaviour on board vessels
- Nowadays, other hidden mental wellbeing risks/stressors like harassment, bullying, gender inequality, cultural divides, communication barriers, power gap, wage, etc., impact seafarers profoundly



Newer Trends

- We've also noticed that crew being harassed, assaulted or bullied experience post trauma exposure, significant psychological stress, loss of confidence, social disconnection, fear of reprisal, etc.
- **Examples?** Can these signs be identified through shifts in behaviour, like withdrawal, anxiety or overly compliant behaviour?



Newer Trends

- Thanks to modern satellite communication and onboard Wi-Fi, crews today are more connected than ever
- Is there a trend where crew struggle to stretch their data, postpone family conversations or missed celebrations?
- Contributes to low wellbeing despite strong connection – feel helpless and a pointless career?
- Split onboard cohesion and relationships



Emotional & Mental Harm

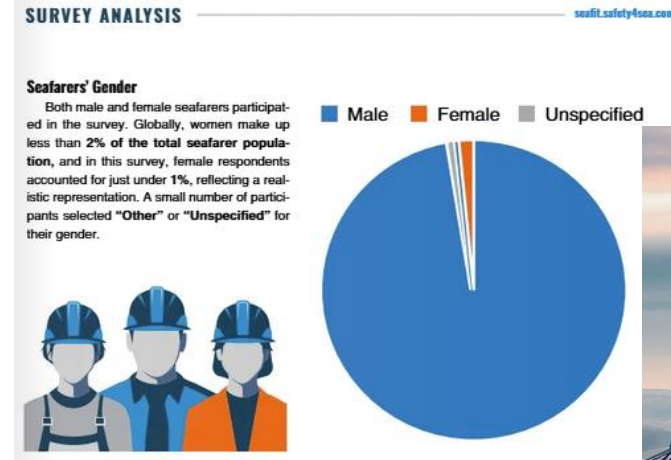
- Sometimes, threats escalate beyond verbal incidents to physical harm
- Nowadays, harassment and bullying also comes in the form of digital intrusions
- Unmanaged threats will degrade crew performance and make mistakes



Unlocking the Drivers of Seafarer Mental Wellbeing

LP question to Dr. Joanna?

- The data shows that female seafarers make up less than 2% of the global population and under 1% in this survey.
- From a wellbeing perspective, what does operating in such an extreme minority mean for psychological safety onboard – and how might this amplify hidden risks like harassment, speaking-up reluctance and social isolation?



06 Women at Sea

The maritime sector continues to be overwhelmingly male-dominated, with women representing just 1% of the active seafaring workforce according to data from surveyed organisations that directly hire seafarers. Out of 211,750 seafarers employed by the 179 organisations that responded to this section of the questionnaire, only 2,223 were women. This stark imbalance highlights the persistent gender disparity within the industry. By rank, 22% of women seafarers hold non-officer ratings, closely followed by second officer at 21% and deck cadets at 15%. Barriers to entry for women in onboard roles within the maritime sector remain evident. Notably, one company explicitly stated in the free-text section of the Survey: "We do not hire women in offshore support vessels." This statement highlights the persistence of discriminatory hiring practices in parts of the industry, which continue to limit opportunities for women seafarers. Survey data further underscores the disparities in female seafarer employment by country. The highest concentrations of reported seafarers were present in the Philippines (35%), Viet Nam (7%) and India (7%). Among women seafarers specifically, the highest representation came from the Philippines (23%) and Greece (10%). A total of 179 organisations surveyed responded 'yes' to operating vessels, with the majority operating bulk carriers (31%), oil tankers (14%), special purpose (12%) and general cargo ships (8%). Of these 179 organisations, 85 actively employ female seafarers on the following types of ships: oil tankers (25%), passenger ships (23%), general cargo (19%) and bulk carriers and special purpose (13% each). The second largest group of women seafarers were employed/served on bulk carriers (26%), oil tankers (22%), general cargo (19%), passenger ships (18%) and special purpose (15%).

Future seafarer demand

Maritime is facing a critical skills shortage, with several reports highlighting the widening gap in workforce and skills. The Maritime Just Transition Taskforce, an initiative led by the United Nations Global Compact, with the collaboration of IMO, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), has created a roadmap towards the maritime skills needed for a just and green transition. This work is vital to the ongoing IMO efforts aimed at preparing the future maritime workforce for a

Source: [IMO-WISTA "Women in Maritime Survey 2024"](#)

Source: Seafit.Safety4Sea



Trauma-informed practice onboard: safer reporting, better interventions

Unlocking the Drivers of Seafarer Mental Wellbeing Webinar
Organized by Brittania P&I

Dr. Joanna Eugenia Bakouni
L&D Manager - Maritime



Today's Agenda

01

Welcome!

Opening + why this matters now

02

What "trauma-informed" really means

Defining trauma, the 4Rs model and 6 Principles to work with

03

How Trauma shows up

In communication, trust and reporting

04

Early indicators of harm

Early indicators leaders can notice, fear of reprisal

05

Turning awareness into targeted interventions

Practical intervention stack + commitment

Why this matters now?



Under-reporting is persistent

- **1 in 5 seafarers** experience some form of psychological harassment (Sailor's Society, 2025)
- Even where policies exist, awareness does not always translate into action. Danish fleet survey, although **62% of seafarers knew how to report**, **24% felt nothing had changed** regarding the issue over the prior year (Froholdt et al., 2023; Global Maritime Forum, 2024)



Fear of retaliation and low trust in outcomes

- Reporting resistance is common due to fear of reprisals or career disadvantage.
- Seafarers avoid reporting because they expect negative consequences, limited follow-through, or no action from management
- **Perceived interpersonal risk**



Regulatory Updates

- The IMO and ILO are strengthening focus on violence and harassment, including **bullying, sexual harassment and assault**, as issues that must be addressed in maritime safety and labour frameworks.

What being trauma-informed really means?

A trauma-informed approach includes an understanding of trauma and an awareness of the impact it can have across settings, services, and populations.

01

Realizing the prevalence of trauma

02

Recognizing how trauma affects all individuals

03

Responding by putting this knowledge into practice

But what is trauma?

Trauma is an experience or set of experiences that is perceived as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and has lasting effects on wellbeing.

- It can result from **a single incident or repeated exposure**
- It is shaped by **how the person experiences the event**, not only the event itself
- **Unexpectedness and lack of control** often intensify impact



Two people can live the same situation; one may carry trauma, the other may not.

- Culture and environment influence reactions
- Personal history and support systems matter
- Responses are often non-linear (not always visible)
- Behaviour changes may signal distress, not “attitude”

But what is Trauma?

"Trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on **mind, brain and body**. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present".

Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.
The body Keeps the Score, 2014



In the brain

Trauma can affect processing and threat response. Stuck in fight-flight-freeze. Difficulty to process information, capacity to think. Depersonalization. Can lead to severe anxiety, stress and PTSD.



In the body

Physical impact may include: Chronic fatigue or sleep disruption, headaches, digestive issues, autoimmune diseases and weakened immunity among other



In relationships

Lack of trust, self-protective behaviors, emotional detachment, difficulty asking for help. Withdrawal from social activities.



In behaviour & performance

Difficulty concentrating or prioritising. Over- or under-reacting to stress. Avoidance, withdrawal, or over-compliance. Increased errors or reduced confidence

Understanding Trauma

The Ripple Effect



Trauma spreads outward like ripples in water:
Strongest impact at the center, wider but softer effects
over time



Effects can last long after the event



Sharing trauma creates *shared impact*



The "4Rs" as an operational model (SAMHSA)



Realize impact



Recognize
signs



Respond in
policies
/practice



Resist re-
traumatization

6 core principles

Adapted from SAMHSA Trauma-Informed Approach Framework

Example in practice:

Safety	Private space offered before discussing an incident instead of talking in the mess room.
Trust & Transparency	Explaining what will happen after a report i.e. who is informed, timelines, and confidentiality limits.
Peer Support	Buddy systems for cadets or new crew joining long voyages.
Collaboration	Asking the individual how they would like the issue handled rather than deciding unilaterally.
Empowerment & Choice	Offering reporting options: master, shore HR, anonymous channel, instead of only one route.
Cultural & Gender Sensitivity	Avoiding assumptions about communication style or emotional expression based on nationality or rank.

*Notice these are **not** psychological interventions.

What Trauma can do to communication

Reactions are often protective, not intentional.



Fragmented or Non-Linear Narratives

People may:

- jump between details
- forget timelines (memory gaps)
- repeat the same point
- change wording



Silence, Withdrawal, or Over-Compliance

People may:

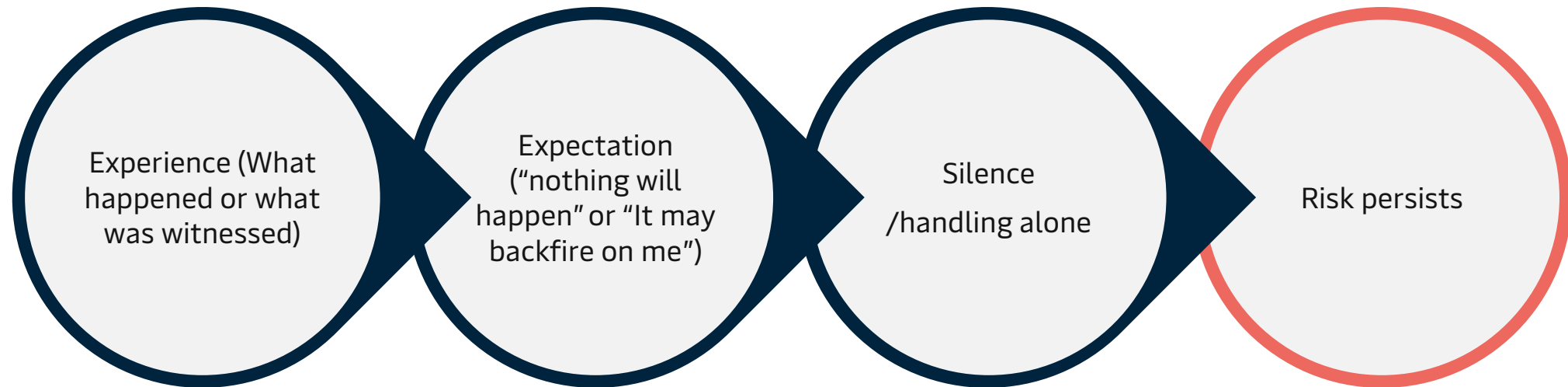
- avoid eye contact
- give very short answers
- agree quickly to end the conversation
- delay reporting

Unexpected Emotional Intensity or Flat Affect:

- appear unusually angry or tearful
- show no visible emotion at all
- react strongly to minor triggers

Trust and reporting behaviours

How experiences shape whether people speak up



Unreported issues rarely disappear; they usually become normalized and repeat

Where ships unintentionally re-traumatize

Small actions that can unintentionally silence reporting

Common unintentional triggers:

- forcing repeated retelling to multiple people
- lack of confidentiality on a small vessel or discussing in public places
- informal mediation too early / rushed process
- investigation questions that imply blame

“

“Re-traumatization” means the occurrence of traumatic stress reactions and symptoms after exposure to multiple events

Impact:

- Delayed or avoided reporting
- Increased stress responses / trigger extremes of emotion / hypervigilance / cognitive paralysis / loss of control
- Reduced trust in leadership
- Higher likelihood of repeated incidents
- An environment that feels intimidating or untrustworthy

Early indicators leaders can notice

01

Individual

withdrawal, sleep issues, repeated “minor” errors, reluctance to speak in briefs

02

Team

jokes that humiliate, social exclusion, “pile-on” dynamics, normalised shouting

03

System

high churn on certain routes/vessels, repeated complaints about a rank/role, “reporting drop-off”



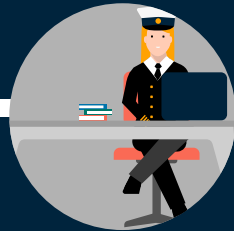
Fear of reprisal: what it looks like onboard

“

“I don't want trouble... maybe it's nothing.”

“Can we just keep this off-record?”

“Maybe I misunderstood.”



Indirect disclosure /
minimising

“

“Last time nothing happened.”

“I've seen what happens when people speak up.”

“It's a small ship, everyone will know.”



Trust breakdown

“

“I'll just handle it myself.”

“It's easier to stay quiet.”

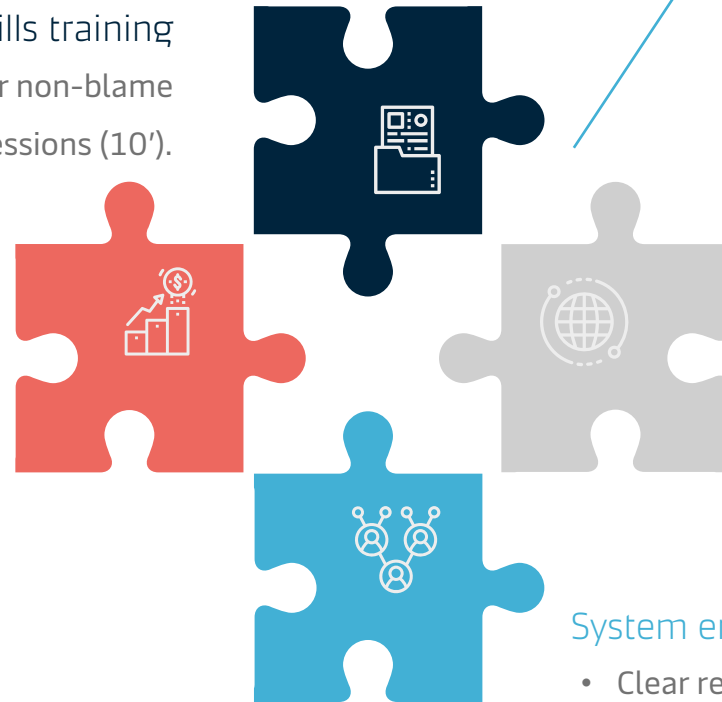


Self-protection behaviour
/ avoidance

A practical intervention stack

Micro-skills training
Focus on key skills (like active listening or non-blame language) and incorporate short practical sessions (10').

Measurement & follow-through
Track reporting trends (anonymised), hotspots, resolution times → Demonstrates that speaking up leads to action, not silence.



Support & Care

- confidential support channels (EAP / counselling / helplines)
- Awareness training sessions on mental health
- Support mechanisms for leaders handling sensitive cases ("compassion fatigue")

Role-based training

- Masters/officers: handling disclosures + difficult conversation
- HR/shore teams: confidentiality & escalation pathways

System enablement

- Clear reporting channels (including anonymous)
- Visible timelines & feedback loops
- Clear policies

3 actions in 30 days

Select **3 realistic actions** for you and your team → assign a **start date** → share with one colleague.

Run a **10-minute toolbox talk** on bystander action + confidentiality

Publish a **single-page reporting map**

Standardise the **first response script** for supervisors ("thank you / safety / options / next steps")

Share a one-page "Who to Talk To" card

Add a 2-minute "Speak-Up Reminder" to weekly safety briefs or team meetings

Politely challenge disrespectful jokes or comments

Check in weekly with one crew member or colleague

Highlight one respectful or supportive action you observed

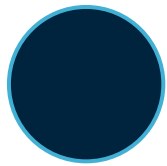
Key takeaways



Many behavioral and physical problems are caused by trauma



Small behavioural changes often have the highest impact.



Skills and systems help prevention. Support pathways help recovery. Both are necessary.



References

1. Sailors' Society (2025) *Bullying and harassment at sea: State of the industry snapshot*. Southampton: Sailors' Society. Available at: https://sailors-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/SS_Bullying_and_Harassment_2025.pdf (Last accessed: 10 January 2025).
2. SAMHSA (2014). *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services*. HHS Publication No. SMA-14-4816.
3. Froholdt, L. L., Grøn, S., Nielsen, J. B., Thapa, S., Nielsen, M. B., Fenn, A., Hansen, E. K., & Ubbesen, T. R. (2023). [CMSS research report: Bullying and harassment in the Danish fleet. Centre for Maritime Health and Society, University of Southern Denmark](#). Also available at: <https://www.eng.em.dk/Media/638344405919123551/Bullying%20and%20harassment%20in%20the%20Danish%20merchabt%20fleet.pdf> (Last accessed: 10 January 2025).
4. Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The Body Keeps the Score: brain, mind and body in the healing of trauma*, Penguin books

Thank you!



Joanna.bakouni@maersktraining.com

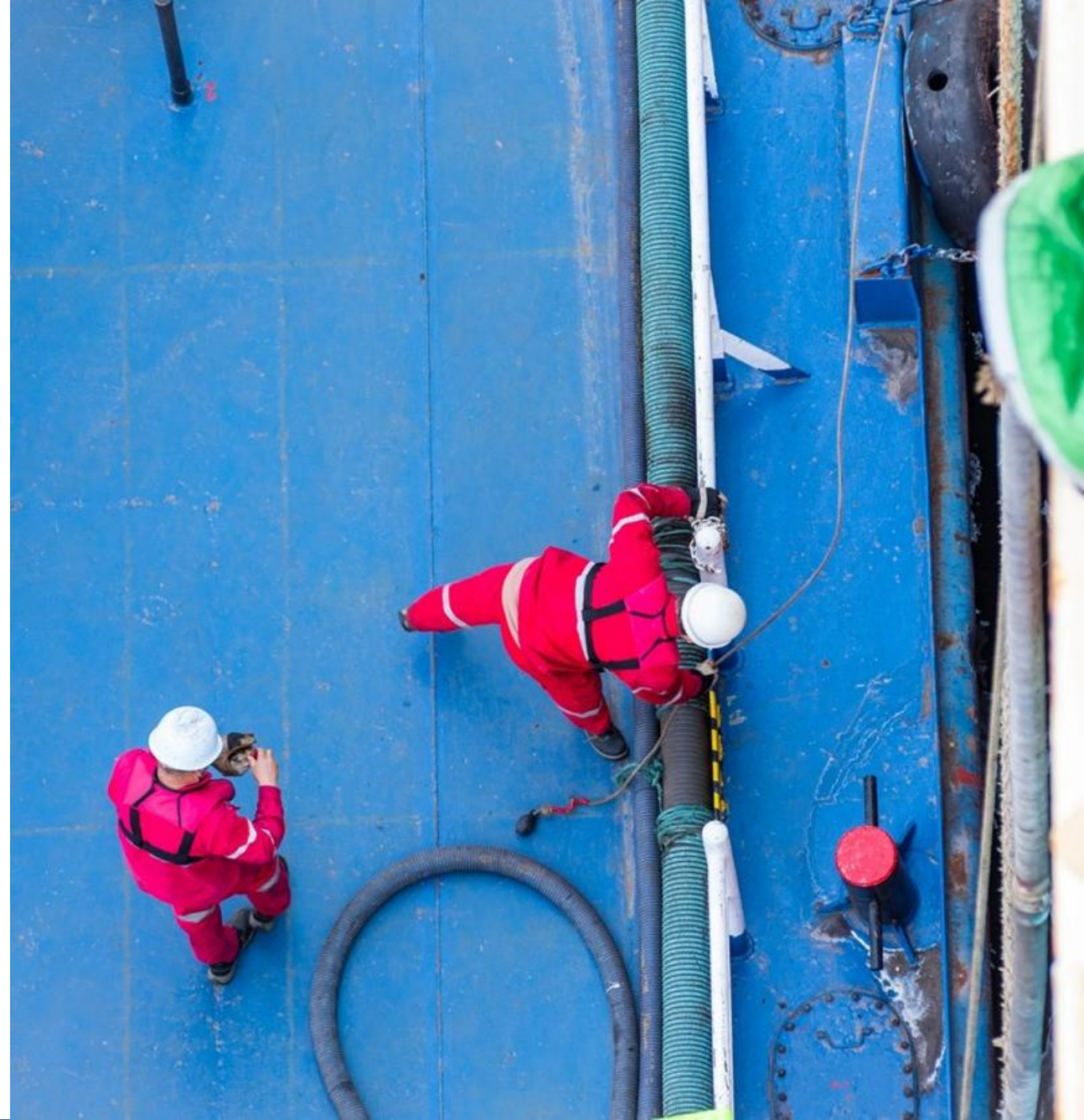
Unlocking the Drivers of Seafarer Mental Wellbeing

Loss Prevention
Capt. Charles Chong



Harm and Risks

- Business as usual for mental health simply will not do.
The result? – high turnover, frequent conflicts, complaints, etc.
- Very limited support for our seafarers
- Early mental health recognition may help to reduce turnover, improve team cohesion and comply STCW wellbeing standards



STCW Training Requirements

- Upcoming STCW addresses focus on trauma-informed leadership and psychological first aid to support crew mental health effectively
- STCW requires anti-harassment protocols (SMS) and cultural intelligence training to foster safe, inclusive multicultural team environments
- Training covers roles of Masters, Safety Officers and DPA to ensure STCW compliance and safety



Unlocking the Drivers of Seafarer Mental Wellbeing

Safety culture

- If incidents are occurring during even the most straightforward operations and SMS in place (barriers), should you be concerned? i.e., when even the Master doesn't bother to look out of the bridge windows when leaving port or speak about the wrongdoing of the team, you probably have a problem with your safety culture...
- Targeted values and practices that management and personnel onboard should share to ensure that risks are always minimised
- A holistic approach on risk management must include effective psychological safety, privacy protection, clear reporting lines and empower peer (crew) to intervene.



Cultural and Hierarchical Barriers

- Cultural norms about respect and avoiding shame often deter crew members from speaking up
- Hierarchical structures onboard increase fear and silence, especially where feedback is discouraged
- Unintended intimidation and unconscious bias further suppress open communication among crew members
- Developing cultural intelligence helps adopt communication that encourages openness and trust onboard



What Else Can Members Do?

Support

- Provide soft skills training to crew – impact of multinational crew
- Provide the necessary resources to develop a healthy work/living environment, no-blame conversation/culture, campaign, etc.
- Leaders can implement early interventions on board or even peer intervention
- Provide “healthy” crewing arrangements, i.e., contract length
- Provide counseling/hotline opportunities



What Else Can Crew Do?

Harassment & Bullying

- Read through your company's relative policy
- Check your job description
- Keep calm and be firm
- Keep a record of the incidents
- Make your line manager aware of the situation
- Speak to colleagues
- Keep it factual
- Alert the company.



**DEALING
WITH
BULLYING
AND
HARASSMENT
ON BOARD
A VESSEL**

LIFE AT SEA IS MARKED BY CONSTANT CHANGE, WITH SEAFARERS SPENDING EXTENDED PERIODS ON BOARD, OFTEN BETWEEN FOUR TO ELEVEN MONTHS. EACH CREW CHANGE BRINGS TOGETHER INDIVIDUALS FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS AND PERSONALITIES, IDEALLY FOSTERING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING. NEVERTHELESS, THE CLUB OCCASIONALLY RECEIVES FEEDBACK AND ENQUIRIES ON HOW TO DEAL WITH CONFLICTS AMONG SEAFARERS.

Loss Prevention Publications

Risk Watch, Health Watch & Guidance

- [Loss Prevention: Gangways on Ships – A Practical Guide](#)
- [Stay Safe On Board](#)
- [Health Watch: Safety First](#)
- [Risk Watch: October 2023](#)
- [Pre-Employment Medical Examinations](#)
- [Crew Watch: Healthy Eating Onboard](#)
- [Crew Watch: The Vital Role of Sleep](#)
- [Crew Watch: Staying Fit Onboard](#)
- [Crew Watch: Liver Health](#)
- [Crew Watch: Diabetes? High Blood Pressure?](#)



B LOSS PREVENTION
PERSONALISED RISK SERVICES



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