

Suicide thoughts: How to support seafarers before it's too late



Seafarers are often at the acute risk of suicide thoughts being exposed to multiple stressors mainly due to isolation or the adverse working conditions at sea. September 10 marks the official World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) annually; when activities including educational and commemorative events, press briefings and conferences, as well as Facebook and Twitter coverage are taking place. But is that enough to support our seafarers before it's too late?

[MARITIME HEALTH](#) | 12/09/18

Did you know that:

- 4% of the global population suffer from depression
- more than 25% of seafarers suffer from depression
- only 21% had spoken to a colleague aboard ship

In general, it is commonly accepted that most suicides and suicide attempts occur among individuals who suffer from undiagnosed and untreated depression, with the **World Health Organization (WHO)** estimating that more than 300 million people are affected by depression worldwide.

As far as the seafaring industry is concerned, the **Yale University** in the United States and international maritime **charity Sailors' Society** conducted research this March, which found that more than one-quarter of seafarers had suffered from depression over a two-week period.

Seafarers spend months on end at sea, facing some of the toughest conditions of any workforce – isolation, cramped living quarters, noise,

heat, storms – sometimes they're not even able to stomach the food on board.

Sailors' Society CEO Stuart Rivers reported earlier this year.

Major factors affecting seafarers' mental health

1. Isolation from family with connectivity remaining the number one demand of seafarers
2. Length of contract and lack of shoreleave
3. Quality and quantity of food on board
4. Work load and fatigue

Suprising is the fact that nearly half of seafarers who report symptoms of depression say they had not asked anybody for help while around one-third turned to family and/or friends; only 21% spoke to a colleague aboard ship.

Moreover, it is of high importance to mention that a [second quarterly report of 2018](#) sees seafarers calling for ship owners, operators and managers to have designated human resource management in place to address concerns and to reflect the growing appreciation and importance of seafarer mental health and wellbeing onboard, according to the Mission to Seafarers.

If you suspect that you or someone close to you may suffer from an anxiety disorder, don't look at the individual behaviours but, instead, look at what has changed.

UK P&I Club warns

Do's and Don'ts to prevent suicide thoughts

Don't

- Sleep too little
- Withdraw from family and friends
- Try to boost your feelings through alcohol/drugs
- keep these suicidal feelings to yourself
- Wait to see whether things get better

Do

- Eat and sleep well
- Communicate with friends and relatives
- Exercise
- Talk
- Take hope; people do get through this

It may be difficult to talk about suicide. But talking openly about suicide can help prevent it!