

CMSS Research Report:

# Bullying and harassment in the Danish merchant fleet

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Centre of  
Maritime Health and Society  
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University of  
Southern Denmark



# Colophon

This report presents both the quantitative and qualitative results of a study on bullying and harassment in the Danish merchant fleet.

The Minister for Industry, Business and Financial Affairs asked the Danish Maritime Authority to conduct an external study of the extent of bullying and harassment among seafarers on Danish vessels. This task was assigned to the Centre of Maritime Health and Society at the University of Southern Denmark. The Commission for the study (in Danish) may be found on the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs website. The report consists of seven chapters, and only the results are presented, by request from the Danish Maritime Authority.

An English “Literature review” is made in a separate annex, with an analysis of other international research studies within the area of bullying and harassment. This has been requested by the Danish Maritime Authority.

It is permitted to quote the results in the report on the condition that the University of Southern Denmark and the Centre of Maritime Health and Society is credited as the source.

The project consortium consists of the following members:

Senior researcher and Head of Research Centre (Project lead)  
Lisa Loloma Froholdt

Senior researcher  
Sisse Grøn

Professor and Head of Department  
Jesper Bo Nielsen

Associate professor  
Subash Thapa

Senior researcher  
Maj Britt Nielsen

Research assistants  
Andrew Fenn  
Elin Kragesand Hansen  
Thilde Risager Ubbesen

Graphical layout  
Graphic Center, University of Southern Denmark  
Andrew Fenn, CMSS

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Centre of Maritime Health and Society  
University of Southern Denmark

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# 01 Summary of the report's results

This is a brief summary of the quantitative results and then the qualitative results. The results are about the prevalence and risk factors of bullying and harassment in six different segments of the Danish merchant fleet.

A total of 3,470 seafarers answered the questionnaire in full or in part, corresponding to a response rate of 21.7%. This has enabled analyses of sub-groups, such as age, and shipping segment, providing good validity. However, in order to maintain validity, cross-cutting analyses of small sub-groups have not been completed.

The qualitative results are based on 32 in-depth interviews with informants who contacted the project on the basis of a request in the questionnaire, who responded to an invitation in a post on social media, or who were invited by the project group as shore-based representatives of sector organisations and shipping segments. The questionnaire provided respondents with an option to write comments in free-text fields, and many made use of this option. These comments were included in the qualitative material, so the results are based on data from two types of sources and a substantial number of persons.

## Prevalence

Questionnaire responses reported a substantial number of cases of bullying, harassment, unwanted sexual attention, threats of violence and actual physical violence. The most vulnerable were the youngest age group under 31 years, women, new arrivals, junior officers and seafarers in the cargo segment. The least vulnerable are seafarers in the offshore segment, passenger vessels and ferries, as well as seafarers in small crews across segments.

Numerically, most victims of violence, bullying and harassment are men, but as there are far more men than women in the sector, a larger percentage of female seafarers' report violence, bullying and harassment.

In two out of three cases, the perpetrator of harassment and violence was a senior officer or team leader. The perpetrator of bullying in more than one-half (60%) of cases was a colleague at the same level, while in 30% of cases a senior officer perpetrated bullying.

The number and scope of reported cases of threats of violence, bullying and harassment makes it unlikely that the issue merely covers individual people, individual shipping companies, or individual segments of the sector. In accordance with the overall scope described in the quantitative results, the qualitative results describe a broadly rooted culture of bullying, with an adverse impact on the mental health of many seafarers.

Informants and respondents need clearer communication from shipping companies regarding zero tolerance of bullying and harassment. Seafarers are also looking for more tangible and specific tools they can use in their daily work.

A large share of both informants and respondents' express satisfaction in sailing on Danish vessels, and many are positive about the initiatives launched to reduce bullying and harassment. However, there are various structural factors for mixed nationality crews such as differences in contracts, including signing-on periods. There are also differences in promotion opportunities. Both issues can have an influence on bullying and harassment, as some groups can be particularly vulnerable and reluctant to report bullying due to uncertain employment conditions and fear of losing their job.

With regard to unwanted sexual attention, the reported advances were often camouflaged as 'fun', making it difficult to say 'no'. Younger members of crews in particular experienced unwanted sexual attention, and the perpetrator was often a senior officer. This is in full accord with the quantitative results. Perpetrators often paid no attention to a rejection; some crew members even experienced reprisals after they had objected. A common strategy is to try to avoid social interaction in order to reduce the risk of experiencing unwanted sexual attention. Varied experiences were reported with respect to case processing of complaints relating to unwanted sexual attention, but 'victim blaming' has been the solution in some cases. The hierarchy also makes the complaints process difficult.

## Risk factors

The qualitative results from respondents and informants show that factors can be divided into physical, structural and personal or cultural factors. The most important mentioned are:

- Isolation
- Fatigue
- Home sickness and sexual desire
- Poor management
- The new, the weak and the different
- National culture or personality

## Work environment

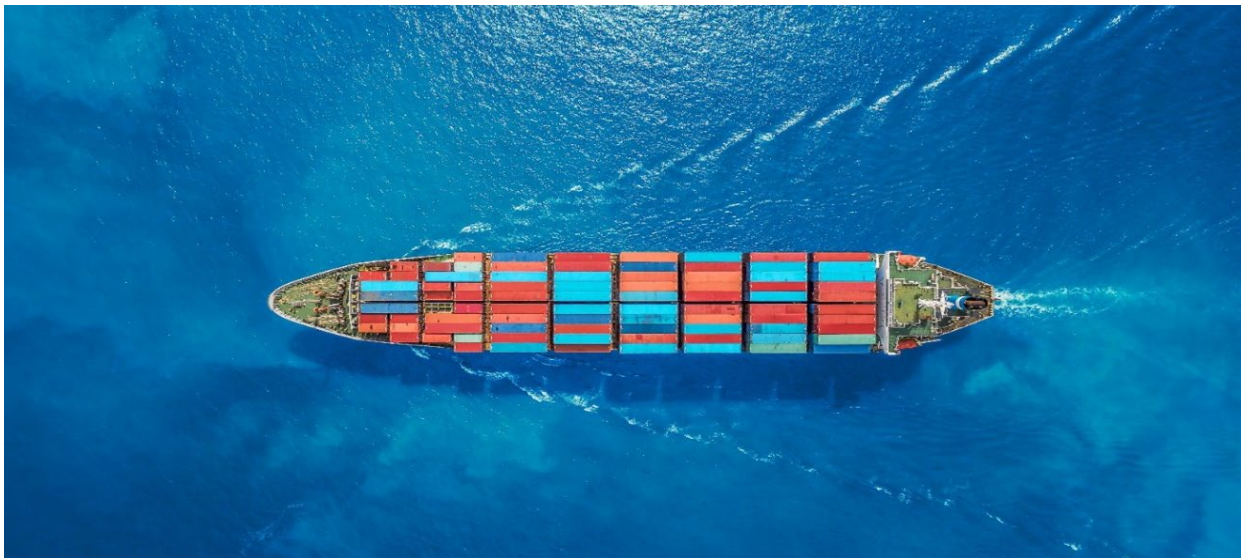
A considerable share express satisfaction, while others find the work environment challenging. Finally, several point to a number of factors in the work environment that contribute to the incidence of bullying, harassment and unwanted sexual attention. These include firstly the nature of the social relationships between the crew. Secondly, management is a factor mentioned in almost every context, and there is broad consensus that there is a need to improve management skills to prevent bullying, harassment, and unwanted sexual attention.

## Current initiatives

Efforts made by shipping companies to combat bullying and harassment, as well as initiatives already implemented vary, but many suggest that more national regulation on the psychosocial work environment could support initiatives by individual shipping companies.

The informants would like more support as well as information on where they can find help. Both informants and respondents mention the need for better officer training in management and personnel management, both at STCW level and as life-long learning. There is generally a widespread desire for more training in the area, from education institutions to shipping-company level.

Some companies have established guidelines for reporting, while in other places there is a lack of knowledge about where, or to whom, incidents can be reported. There is also a need for more and better information about complaints policies and processes for seafarers. Informants want more uniformity across the fleet with regard to managing bullying and harassment, and they report that e-learning is not enough to change values.





## 02 Introduction

Bullying and harassment in the workplace are complex issues, which can have serious consequences for employees' physical and mental health. Work-related bullying and harassment have a significant impact on employees' health and wellbeing and can lead to stress or post-traumatic stress reaction (Mayhew and Chapell 2007). It can also undermine social cohesion, safety, and teamwork efficiency. Companies may also experience adverse consequences in the form of poorer work environment as well as potential organisational, financial and legal consequences. Research shows that bullying and harassment are considerable challenges in the maritime sector (Stannard et al., 2015; Forsell et al., 2017). Studies document that the primary perpetrators of bullying and harassment are managers, superiors, colleagues, and passengers (Österman and Boström 2022).

One of the four regulations within international shipping is the 2006 Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), which entered into force in 2013. The MLC was an important step towards establishing good working conditions for all seafarers in accordance with UN sustainable development goal no. 8 on decent work and economic growth. Countries that have ratified the MLC are obligated to work towards eliminating discrimination in recruitment and employment.

The 2016 amendments to the MLC entered into force on 8 January 2019. These amendments concern the protection of health and safety and prevention of accidents. Governments and shipping companies are expected to take measures to better protect seafarers against bullying and harassment aboard, in accordance with the guidelines published by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) (2016). Shipping companies were directed to prepare policies and procedures to demonstrate their willingness to forge a work environment free of bullying, harassment, and discrimination. These policies are required to be integrated in vessels' Safety Management System under the International Safety Management Code.

In May 2022, resolutions were adopted regarding bullying and harassment of seafarers, including harassment based on gender and sexual abuse. These will enter into force in 2024 (ILO-News 2022). Although gender-related harassment has been added to the MLC, earlier research has suggested that the challenges entailed in managing the cultural diversity in the maritime sector are also associated with bullying and harassment (Knudsen og Froholdt, 2009; Froholdt, 2007, 2008, 2010; Kavechi, Lane and Sampson, 2002; Østreng, 2006; Theotokas and Progoulaki, 2007; Nielsen et al., 2013; Carol-Dekker and Khan, 2016). These additions to the MLC aim to ensure a safe and inclusive work environment for seafarers.

In order to enhance overall efforts against bullying and harassment several Danish stakeholders established three initiatives in 2015:

- Shipping companies must generate greater awareness about the challenges and solutions linked to cases of harassment.
- Bullying and harassment must be a compulsory part of the training programme for members of safety organisations aboard vessels.
- A hotline is to be set up at Seahealth.

It is relevant to follow up on how these initiatives have progressed, and whether more could be done to improve them, including coordinating them with the latest initiatives with the MLC.

Bullying and harassment recently attracted attention from the Danish media in summer 2022, indicating that there are challenges to address. Therefore, the Minister for Industry, Business and Financial Affairs asked the Danish Maritime Authority to conduct an external study to describe the prevalence of bullying and harassment in



the Danish merchant fleet. The Commission is available (in Danish) on the Ministry's website.

The purpose of this study is primarily to determine the incidence of bullying and harassment on Danish vessels today (2023), and in the recent past (2022). The study covers both Danish and non-Danish seafarers. This will provide a detailed analysis of the many types of bullying and harassment occurring in the merchant fleet, including unwanted sexual attention and/or harassment, violence, racism, and discrimination on the grounds of religion, cultural background, and sexual orientation.

This report is to be part of a basis for recommendations to further strengthen initiatives already launched against bullying and harassment.

This study will also examine whether there are segments with specific challenges regarding bullying and harassment. These segments examined are as follows:

- Cargo ships etc. sailing international routes with a duration of more than two days.
- Cargo ships etc. sailing short international routes with a duration of up to two days.
- Cargo ships etc. sailing exclusively in national service.
- Ships servicing offshore installations.
- Passenger ships international service.
- Ferries and other passenger ships sailing national routes.

The data used in this report are based on a questionnaire and individual interviews. This report does not evaluate all efforts to combat bullying and harassment in the Danish maritime sector, although these may be covered in further studies.

The data are used to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the prevalence of bullying and harassment in the Danish merchant fleet?
2. What are the risk factors of bullying and harassment in segments of the Danish merchant fleet?
3. What approaches are utilised by shipping companies, including management and seafarers, to tackle bullying and harassment, and to promote mental health at the workplace? How are these efforts implemented in practice? And how are they experienced?
4. How has the sector or other stakeholders managed cases of reported or non-reported bullying and harassment in the Danish fleet?

In order to prevent and manage bullying and harassment at the workplace as well as possible, it is important to document the prevalence of bullying and harassment, and how they arise. This will create a common outset for further preventive work. In order to help stakeholders in the sector to participate in a knowledge-based debate and discussion about bullying and harassment, it is important that this common outset is based on detailed and independent research. New research could also contribute to breaking down barriers to decent working conditions in the maritime sector, and this is an important component for quality shipping and can contribute to work regarding the MLC.

## Definitions

Bullying has been defined as the experience of sustained uncomfortable or degrading treatment, including rejection, exclusion, hurtful teasing, or any form of poor treatment. These acts are repeated over a period, and the people who are the subject of the acts find it difficult to defend themselves.

A group of people or an individual may feel threatened or intimidated because of negative or hostile behaviour by another group.

Bullying may involve abuse of power or position, and it is often persistent and unpredictable. It may be revengeful, vindictive, or malicious. However, a person may not realise the effect of their behaviour on other people or have no intention to bully. Bullying has no legal definition, but it is based on how it is perceived by the person or group.

Harassment, in this study, refers to situations in which a person's dignity or self-respect are violated by others, and this creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive atmosphere. Harassment can be based on different categories such as race, religion or belief, cultural background, gender, and sexual orientation (EU directives 2000/43 and 2000/78).

Harassment has a legal definition, which means that it is illegal in many countries. Harassment is a form of discrimination which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment (ICS and ITF 2016).

Sexual harassment is both a scientific and a legal term. One of the most recognised conceptual frameworks in the scientific literature distinguishes between three types of sexual harassment: 1) unwanted sexual attention (e.g., unwanted physical contact), 2) coercion (e.g., job-related pressure or bribery) and 3) gender harassment (e.g., negative comments about men and women).

The legal definition, as described in the EU Directive on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women (Directive 2002/73/EC), defines sexual harassment as any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person or creating a hostile and humiliating environment.

Harassing behaviour is behaviour experienced by the recipient as harassment.

BaHDIS is the name of this study, and it is an abbreviation of 'Bullying and Harassment in Danish Shipping'.

### **Thank you from the seafarers**

Many informants and respondents have expressed their gratitude to the University of Southern Denmark for conducting the BaHDIS study, and they recognise that it is both timely and necessary:

*"Thank you because, through this study, you are aiming to improve work and life aboard ship and improve conditions on board. I believe that the mental health conditions are very important. Many thanks to you all, now we feel that at least some people are concerned about us".*

These reactions to the study stress its importance for the sector.





## 03 Background

Bullying and harassment have received considerable attention in Denmark in recent years. There was also significant focus on these issues in the Danish merchant fleet in summer 2022, and this indicates that there are challenges onboard requiring attention, and that there is a need for more research to facilitate a knowledge-based debate and to contribute to knowledge-based decisions. On 15 August 2022, the Minister for Industry, Business and Financial Affairs asked the Danish Maritime Authority (DMA) to conduct an external study of the extent of bullying and harassment among seafarers on Danish vessels. This task was entrusted to the Centre of Maritime Health and Society at the University of Southern Denmark. Due to the Danish general election in autumn 2022, work on the study was interrupted and resumed in February 2023.

It is commendable that the Danish flag state has initiated a study of bullying and harassment in its merchant fleet. This demonstrates a willingness and responsibility to address these problems. New research can help break down barriers to decent conditions in the global maritime sector. This will also support endeavours to secure compliance with UN Sustainable Development Goal, no. 8, 'Decent work and economic growth', as well as other initiatives such as the 2006 International Labour Organization (ILO) MLC and ongoing work in this area under the IMO.

To secure a valid data basis, which can be applied to measure the prevalence of bullying and harassment in the Danish merchant fleet, Danish shipping companies agreed to send individual emails to all seafarers employed on Danish vessels. Thanks to these efforts, the questionnaire reached 15,994 seafarers out of a total of 18,791 seafarers in the merchant fleet: a remarkable achievement. This is the main reason for the unprecedented and comprehensive data basis for this report.

The prevalence of bullying and harassment in the Danish fleet is examined for questions relating to different categories - 1) work environment, 2) bullying, 3) harassment, including unwanted sexual attention, and 4) the negative acts - in order to clarify issues regarding bullying. Previously validated questions were used, including elements of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire II (COPSOQII), the short version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-S), the Questionnaire for the Unwanted Sexual Attention and Harassment in the Workplace (SUSO), as well as relevant targeted questions.

The data presented come from a data basis which includes a questionnaire survey in which 15,994 employees were invited to take part, and an interview survey, in which 41 seafarers and shore-based employees were either invited to take part (16 people) or voluntarily took part (25 people).

The data allow for a broad analysis and mapping of bullying and harassment in a unique Danish workplace at sea, and this can give stakeholders extensive knowledge about these issues and serve as the basis for further preventive work. The study also contributes to the elucidation of these under-researched topics as well as knowledge about some of the characteristics and dynamics at stake when an employee is bullied or harassed in the workplace at sea. This knowledge will establish a solid basis for better efforts to reduce and eliminate these problems in the workplace and contribute to the necessary further revisions of the 1978 International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for seafarers (STCW) (revised in 2010). It will also facilitate preparation of materials and further practical tools within maritime education and training to help seafarers and shipping companies manage these matters.

Finally, the data can be used as the basis for maritime workplaces or flag states to map the prevalence of these conditions.

## 04 Method

This study applies a mixed-methods approach, and combines a quantitative cross-sectional study with subsequent qualitative, semi-structured interviews to study the prevalence and risk factors of bullying and harassment in six different segments of the Danish merchant fleet, and to explore how reported and non-reported cases are managed.

The methods have individual benefits, restrictions, and distinct differences, but they are bolstered by combining the two. The quantitative approach enables a study of the prevalence of bullying and harassment, which contributes to the understanding of causality or correlation between different variables using statistical information about patterns in the data. This method provides answers to “how”. The qualitative approach, however, provides an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the incidence of bullying and harassment, which sheds light on the complex questions and issues with rich descriptions and explanations of patterns in the data. This method provides answers to “why”.

Together, these methods contribute to a comprehensive and diverse understanding of the research questions, facilitating answers to both quantitative and qualitative questions, and giving a more complete insight into bullying and harassment in the Danish merchant fleet.

### Study participants

Danish shipping consists of 779 vessels with a gross tonnage of 23.24 million (2022). Based on population data from 2022, 18,791 seafarers were employed in shipping companies. Of this population, Danish nationals constituted 38.9%, while 61.1% were international seafarers. The shipping companies examined employ seafarers on different types of vessels, including container vessels, tankers, passenger vessels, offshore vessels, small national ferries and small private ferries. The precise classification is described in the “Introduction”. It may be noted that there is a relatively low level of representation of female seafarers in the total fleet, at around 3% of the total number of seafarers.

### Sampling and recruitment

Danish shipping companies were contacted and informed about the purpose of the study. They were requested to help in the study. All the shipping companies contacted were cooperative and forwarded a mail of invitation to their seafarers. Of the total 18,791 seafarers, 15,994 received the invitation to the questionnaire survey. Ultimately, 3,470 seafarers took part in the survey in full or in part. This resulted in a response rate of 21.7%, with 3,006 men, 404 women, and 17 other genders.

The mail of invitation included detailed information on the study and a web address that guided participants to a form in which they could give their informed consent and answer the questionnaire. The survey was open for responses from 13 February to 31 March 2023.

In order to ensure the greatest possible participation, the University of Southern Denmark entered a post on social media three times with reminders to take part. A short draft text was sent to shipping companies that they could edit for their own communication, newsletters etc. The Danish Maritime Authority (DMA) and the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) worked together on the wording and design of information, and a film to explain the study was uploaded on the DMA website. To facilitate participation in the survey, materials such as films and invitations were distributed via social media. As the emails were forwarded by the shipping companies themselves, it is very likely that more seafarers could have participated in the survey but did not due to concerns about lack of anonymity.

### Quantitative data

The questionnaire used in this study was administered via SurveyXact. In order to meet participants' different language preferences, the questionnaire was available in both English and Danish. This decision was made as a

significant number of the seafarers working for Danish shipping companies are of a nationality other than Danish, and they are more comfortable reading and responding to questions in English.

To ensure the quality of the questionnaire, the questions in the questionnaire were discussed and revised several times in collaboration with the DMA and the Advisory Group set up for the purpose, which included stakeholders from the sector associations, trade unions and Local Government Denmark. Revisions focused on keeping the questionnaire as short as possible, using appropriate language relevant for the maritime sector, and ensuring that the language was easily understood for respondents where English was not their first language. The dependent variables included exposure to threats of violence, physical violence, bullying, harassment, unwanted sexual attention, rape, and other negative acts.

### **Threats of violence and exposure to physical violence**

Measuring threats of violence was based on the question: "Have you been exposed to the threat of violence onboard within the last 12 months?" Similarly, exposure to physical violence was based on the question: "Have you been exposed to physical violence onboard within the last 12 months?" Response options for both questions were: "Yes, daily", "Yes, weekly", "Yes, monthly", "Yes, a couple of times" and "No". In the final analysis, responses "Yes, daily", "Yes, weekly", "Yes, monthly" and "Yes, a couple of times" were merged to form the single category, "Yes". The response categories for the final analysis were thus "No", "Yes" and "Prefer not to answer".

### **Bullying**

The variable to measure bullying, was assessed through the question: "Have you been exposed to bullying at your current workplace aboard within the last 12 months?" The response options to this question were "No", "Yes, once" and "Yes, from time to time". In the final analysis, responses were divided into a binary variable with "Yes" and "No". The definition of bullying particularly states that it is continuous actions that repeat over a period, and in order to avoid errors in this understanding, the response category "Yes, once" was included. This means that the overall count of bullying includes actions that occur more than once, as implied by the definition.

### **Harassment**

The measurement of exposure to harassment was based on the following question: "Have you been exposed to harassment at your current workplace aboard within the last 12 months?" The response options to this question were "Yes, daily", "Yes, weekly", "Yes, monthly", "Yes, a couple of times" and "Prefer not to answer." These response options were merged into three categories for the final analysis: "None", "Yes" and "Prefer not to answer".

### **Unwanted sexual attention**

17 questions from the Questionnaire for the Unwanted Sexual Attention and Harassment in the Workplace (SUSO) were used. SUSO is a validated instrument composed of 21 questions related to unwanted sexual attention (e.g., unwanted comments on body, clothes or lifestyle), sexual harassment (e.g., for negative comments about men and women) and coercion (e.g., being asked for sexual favours in exchange for reward). The reason for only including 17 questions in the present study was to reduce the number of questions in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to state the incidence using the response "Never", "Once", "2 to 5 times", "6 to 9 times" and "10 times or more".

### **Rape**

This variable was based on the question: "Have you experienced attempted rape, or actual rape within the last 12 months in connection with your work onboard?" with the responses "No", "Once", "Several times" and "Prefer not to answer". In the final analysis, the responses were divided into "Yes" and "No".



## Negative acts

To elaborate on bullying, negative acts experienced by seafarers were measured using validated instruments. This included permission to use elements from the short version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-S) developed by Einarsen, Raknes, Matthiesen and Hellesøy (1994), which is one of the most commonly used questionnaires in research to assess the incidence of bullying and harassment in the workplace. The questionnaire contained elements such as: "Necessary information has withheld from you, which made it difficult to do your work within the last 12 months" and "Gossip and rumours were spread about you within the last 12 months". The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, and the respondents were asked to assess the incidence using the responses "Never", "Now and then", "Monthly", "Weekly" and "Daily".

## Sociodemographic characteristics

The independent variables in this study included various sociodemographic characteristics, work-related characteristics and the work environment. Sociodemographic characteristics were age, divided into the categories "30 or less", "31-40", "41-50" and ">50", and gender, broken down by the categories "man", "woman" and "other". Work-related characteristics included segments, divided into categories such as "Cargo>2 days", "Cargo<2 days", "Offshore", "Passenger international" and "Ferry and passenger short". The size of the crew was divided into the categories "<16", "16-25" and ">25". Work experience was divided into the categories "0-3", "4-10", "11-20", and ">20". Rank/position onboard included categories such as "Cadet", "Rating", "Junior officer", "Senior officer" and "Other". Employment characteristics included options such as "Full-time employment", "Temporary contract", "Employment through agency", "Single-voyage contract" and "Other".

## Other questions

Furthermore, the questionnaire included questions related to the work environment, such as satisfaction with the working conditions and job, availability of assistance and support from senior officers and experiences of improvements in the work environment within the past 12 months. These questions were based on the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire II (COPSOQII) developed by the National Research Centre for the Working Environment.

## Qualitative data

All seafarers in the fleet were invited to participate in an interview. This was via a questionnaire, via an invitation from the DMA, and via the posts on social media by the University of Southern Denmark. 25 people joined voluntarily and 16 people were specifically selected. There were both seafarers and shore-based people in both groups. Altogether, this gave a data basis of 41 people. The selected informants were reminded twice for responses regarding participation. Of the 9 informants who did not take part, 1 was voluntary and 8 were selected. They did not respond to the invitation to participate, they withdrew voluntarily, or they preferred not to participate.

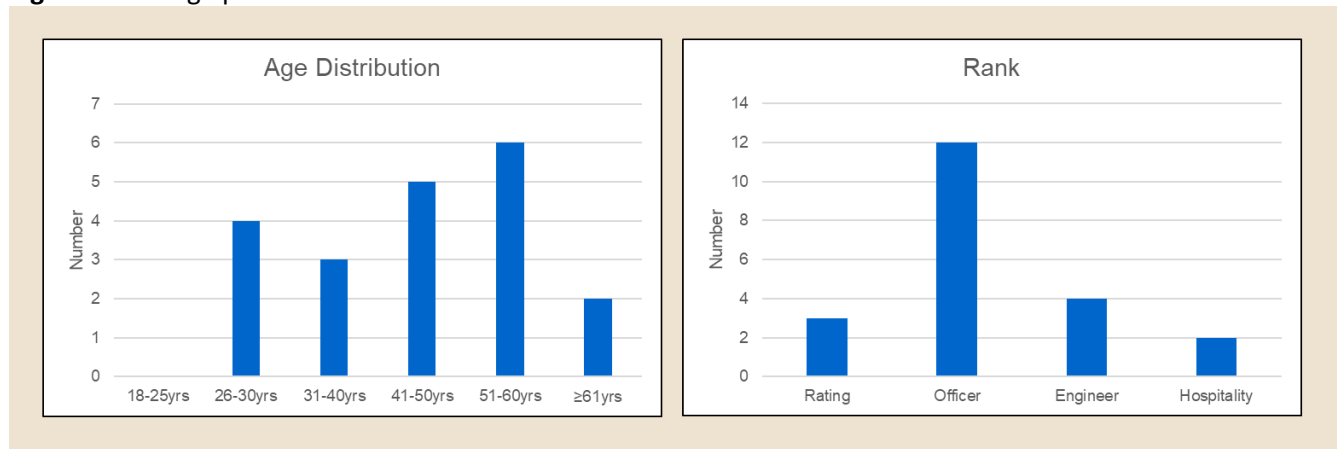
This resulted in 32 participants in the survey; 21 seafarers and 11 shore-based informants. 24 people were from the volunteer sample and 8 people from the selected. Figure 1 illustrates this distribution.

**Figure 1:** Data basis and distribution of interview informant

	Data basis and participants			Distribution Sea/Shore	
	Volunteers	Selected	Total	Sea	Shore
Data basis	25	16	41	26	15
Participants in all	24	8	32	21	11

The seafarers comprised men and women and there were employees from all shipping segments except segment 6<sup>1</sup>. There was a broad range of ages and representation from different ranks, as shown in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2:** Demographic information on seafarer informants



*Note to Figure 2. "Officers" includes captains and masters*

In order to secure representation of the interviewees (informants) both ashore and at sea, across segments of the merchant fleet and relevant stakeholders in the sector, invitations and reminders were sent to relevant informants. Interviews were held in person or online in the period from 2 March to 3 May 2023 (approx. 2 months). Given the limited period of the study (from 1 February to 30 June 2023), it has been assessed as satisfactory that 32 informants have contributed to the qualitative data material.

An interview guide was prepared on the basis of the questionnaire, and the interview sessions took an average of one hour. The aim of the interviews was to allow the informants to elaborate on the questions in the questionnaire and contribute to a deeper understanding of the culture and standards aboard in the different segments.

## Data analysis

When processing the quantitative data, descriptive statistics were applied to present the variables, including percentages, mean values, and standard deviations. Bivariate analyses included performing chi<sup>2</sup> tests to compare proportions between different groups. Separate chi<sup>2</sup> tests and t-tests were performed for specific sub-groups, e.g., men and women, with a view to examining differences in the results. Significance was set at less than 0.05 to consider results as statistically significant. The data analysis was performed using Stata 17.0 for Windows.

The qualitative analysis of the open questions in the questionnaire included several steps. First, personally identifiable information was cleaned and anonymised. Then the responses were imported into the NVivo software in which specific concepts or ideas were allocated codes or tags using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of coding and identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data. This resulted in a data set of 54 pages.

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<sup>1</sup> Segment 1: Cargo ships etc. sailing international routes with a duration of more than two days.  
 Segment 2: Cargo ships etc. sailing short international routes with a duration of up to two days.  
 Segment 3: Cargo ships etc. sailing exclusively in national service.  
 Segment 4: Ships servicing offshore installations.  
 Segment 5: Passenger ships international service.  
 Segment 6: Ferries and other passenger ships sailing national routes.

With regards to the in-depth interviews, all of the recordings were transcribed and imported into the NVivo software. Thematic analysis was also applied to analyse the interview data. This coding resulted in an extensive data set of 168 pages, giving a total qualitative data set of 222 pages.

### **Limitations of the study**

It may be noted that many seafarers were afraid to participate in the BaHDIS study, and some were encouraged not to participate in it. The BaHDIS team were contacted several times about these concerns.

One of the seafarers said:

*"I asked someone who had been here for a long time [about taking part in the BaHDIS study], and they said that I shouldn't because they're watching you. They know who's answering".*

Another seafarer asked the BaHDIS team for a link to the survey and claimed that it would not be anonymous if seafarers used the link that was sent to the ship.

The BaHDIS team was also contacted by a seafarer who complained about an imbalance in the project, as only respondents with a captain who allowed participation could take part in the study. The captain of this seafarer had said:

*"Yeah, Yeah, I deleted it immediately. We really can't have someone who ticks off all parameters of bullying and being subjected to sexual harassment. So you'll have to make a choice".*

The seafarer believed that this was also practice on other vessels in the merchant fleet. The BaHDIS team was not aware that managers had access to all IT search activity on the ship before the survey had commenced.

These problems should be considered as limitations of the study, and it is very likely that more seafarers could have participated in the survey but did not because they were concerned about lack of anonymity and possible reprisals.



# 05 Quantitative results of the questionnaire

## Summary

- A response rate of 21.7% and a total of 3,470 responses is satisfactory and made it possible also to analyse sub-groups based on the characteristics of the respondents. A previously validated question framework was used.
- Some cross-sectoral analyses were deliberately rejected, as the specific sub-groups would be too small to maintain validity and anonymity.
- A substantial number of instances of bullying and harassment, as well as threats and actual physical violence.
- The most vulnerable were the youngest age group under 31 years, women, those with the shortest sailing experience, junior officers and seafarers in the cargo segment.
- There were relatively fewer descriptions of bullying, harassment, and violence from offshore, passenger vessels and ferries and from smaller crews (<16 persons).
- A larger percentage of female employees reported violence, bullying, harassment and unwanted sexual attention than men. However, because of the disproportionate gender distribution, far more men were subjected to violence, bullying and harassment than women.
- In about two out of three cases of experiences of harassment and violence, the perpetrator was a senior officer/team leader.
- In approximately 60% of cases of bullying, the perpetrator was a colleague, and in approximately 30% of cases a senior officer perpetrated the bullying.
- The number of cases of threats of violence, harassment and bullying is so high that they are very unlikely to be attributable to specific individuals, companies, or segments in the industry.

## Response to questionnaire and framework of understanding

The questionnaire was sent to 15,994 of the almost 19,000 potential recipients in the sector, corresponding to 85%: a satisfactory percentage. With 3,470 partial or complete responses out of the 15,994 questionnaires distributed, this gave a response rate of around 22%, which is satisfactory compared with comparable studies that also use an invitation and a link to an online response form. Compared with other similar surveys at sea, this is a very large study, and probably the study with the highest number of female participants.

The persons who answer a questionnaire are known as respondents, while interview participants are called informants. The results can be calculated in relation to a single variable, e.g., the number of responses from men, or how the responses break down across the number of years at sea. This will usually provide a figure or percentage and it describes something about

the group of respondents who have chosen to participate. These figures are often used to discuss representativeness, i.e., whether the group of respondents achieved largely corresponds to the whole group, or whether there is some over- or under-representation. For example, one could calculate how many overall have been exposed to bullying, and then state how many in different age groups have been subjected to bullying.

If the percentage for a sub-group is higher than that for the whole group, this means that there is a relatively higher rate of reported bullying for the specific age group, and the opposite if the percentage is lower.

Note that as there are far more men in the sector (and consequently more responses from men than women), it is possible that there is a higher percentage of women (a given incident occurs relatively more frequently for women than for men), although the

actual figure for those who have been subjected to the incident is higher for men than for women.

## What characterises the group of seafarers who responded to the questionnaire?

As stated in Table 1 and Table 2, 404 (12%) of the respondents were women, and age was largely evenly distributed between respondents in the groups: under the age of 30, between 31 and 40 years, between 41 and 50 years, and over 50 years.

**Table 1:** Respondents by gender

Gender distribution*		
	Number	% **
Men	3,006	88%
Women	404	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,410</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* Gender distribution for only women and men, the 'other' gender category has not been included  
 \*\* % of total

**Table 2:** Age distribution of respondents

Age distribution*		
Age	Number	%**
≤ 30	948	28%
31-40	956	28%
41-50	714	21%
>50	811	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,429</b>	<b>101%</b>

\*Men, women and other gender categories are included  
 \*\*% of total (Rounding causes a total above 100%)

The majority of respondents (59%) worked in the cargo segment, whereas 18% worked in the offshore segment and 24% in the passenger and ferry segment. The gender distribution was not the same across segments. For example, women made up 32% of the respondents from international passenger shipping, whereas women accounted for just 6% of offshore.

**Table 3:** Respondents by shipping segment

	Shipping segments			
	Number	% *	Women	% **
Cargo >2 days	1,655	49%	98	6%
Cargo <2 days	353	10%	35	10%
Offshore	598	18%	35	6%
Passengers (International routes)	543	16%	179	33%
Passengers (National routes)	261	8%	57	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,410</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>12%</b>

\* % of total (Rounding causes a total above 100%)

\*\* % of segment

The division into segments gave adequate group sizes for subsequent valid analyses.

The primary variables analysed in this report are gender, age, shipping segment, size of crew, experience at sea and rank on board.

## Exposure to threats of or actual physical violence

253 respondents reported threats of violence, corresponding to 8% of all respondents, and 67 respondents, corresponding to 2%, reported actual physical violence within the past 12 months.

**Table 4:** Physical violence and threats of violence

	Number	% *
Threats	253	8%
Violence	67	2%

\* % of 3,120 respondents

Respondents also reported attempted rape, but the figures are too small for concrete analysis.

Table 5 (and 8) should be read as meaning that if the percentage is greater than the total percentage, then the event occurs more frequently than in other groups. Conversely, at low percentages.

Threats of violence occur most often for younger employees, employees with less than 11 years' experience at sea, cadets, and junior officers as well as in the cargo segment as a whole. However, threats of violence are less frequent among employees in smaller crews (<16), as well as in international passenger vessels and in the offshore segment. There is no common trend for the other sub-groups.

**Table 5: Threats of violence**

Incidents of threats of violence	
	% *
Total	8%
Age ≤ 30	12%
Cadet/Junior officer	11%
Experience 0-10 år	12%
Cargo	10%
Offshore	5%
Passengers international	6%
Number < 16	3%

\* % of respondents in sub-group,  
e.g. % of respondents in offshore

The picture is more or less the same for cases reported of reported actual physical violence onboard. The figures are very small but reports of being subjected to physical violence were almost twice as common for women than for men.

In 6 out of 10 cases, the threat of physical violence was from a senior officer or a team leader.

**Table 6: Violence or threats of violence**

	Who did it?			
	Threats		Violence	
	Number	% *	Number	% *
Colleague	65	26%	24	36%
Senior Officer	157	62%	34	51%
Client/passenger	31	12%	9	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* % of total (threats/violence)

Actual physical violence was described as perpetrated by a senior officer or by a team leader in more than half of the 67 cases, and one-third were perpetrated by colleagues.

### Exposure to bullying and harassment

In total, 513 respondents reported exposure to bullying, corresponding to 17% of respondents. One in six men (16%), and one in four women (24%) reported bullying. In relative terms, bullying was more frequent among female respondents, but due to the disproportionate gender distribution, and despite the low percentage, there is a far greater number of men that have been subjected to bullying and harassment in the past year.

**Table 7: Exposure to bullying and harassment**

	Bullying and harassment					
	Men	% *	Women	% *	W+M	% *
Bullying	430	16%	83	24%	513	17%
Harassment	246	9%	61	18%	307	10%

\* % of respondent group

\*\* Only men and women, gender category 'other' has not been included

Table 8 shows that bullying occurs most frequently against young employees (21%), junior officers (26%) and employees in the cargo segment with more than two days away (19%). Bullying is reported more rarely by other groups, but still by around 10% of senior officers and by employees with more than 20 years of experience. The differences are in absolute size and are not critically large between the groups, so it is difficult to make valid statistical analyses.

This is due to the fact that the calculation depends on whether all the questions in a series of questions were answered. 878 respondents did not answer all the questions in the series. Thus one-quarter of the group fall out, but it is not possible to see who these informants are. However, despite some uncertainty, the figures indicate that seafarers from three groups in particular (youngest age group, junior officers and seafarers with fewest years in the industry) were subjected to bullying ("negative acts").

**Table 8: Bullying and harassment**

	Bullying/Harassment	
	Bullying % *	Harassment % *
Total	17%	11%
Age ≤ 30	21%	14%
Cargo >2 days	19%	11%
Junior officer	26%	17%
Senior officer	11%	9%
>20 years' experience	10%	7%

\* % of respondent group

With respect to who perpetrated the bullying, the numbers show that in more than 60% of cases it was a colleague, and in almost 30% of cases it was a senior officer.



**Table 9: Who bullies and harasses?**

	Who did it? (no. and %)			
	Bullying		Harassment	
	No.	%*	No.	%*
Colleague	323	67%	89	27%
Senior officer	144	30%	210	64%
Client/passenger	18	4%	27	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>99%</b>

\* % of respondents subjected to bullying and harassment, respectively.  
(Rounding causes a total below 100%)

### Exposure to harassment

A total of 311 respondents (all gender categories) reported harassing behaviour. Almost 10% of male respondents and 18% of female respondents had experienced being subjected to harassment. In relative terms, harassment was more frequent among female respondents, but due to the disproportionate gender distribution, despite the low percentage, a far greater number of men have been subjected to harassment in the past year.

Harassing behaviour is most frequent against younger employees (14%) and junior officers (17%). Harassing behaviour is reported least often by senior officers and employees with more than 20 years' experience, but still by 7-9%.

With respect to who perpetrated the harassment against the 311 respondents who experienced it, the figures show in 68% of cases it was a senior officer, and in 29% it was a colleague.

Regarding the question of what the harassment was about, respondents could give more than one answer (therefore there are more than 311 answers and more than 100%). The 311 respondents had experienced harassment related to race (21%), religion (10%), cultural background (18%), gender (14%), sexual orientation (7%), and other reasons (66%). Thus, there is a large hidden figure regarding the type of harassment, and it should be noted that physical appearance, for example, was not a response option.

**Table 10: Causes of harassment**

	Harassment related to	
	Number	% *
Race	66	21%
Religion or faith	30	10%
Cultural background	56	18%
Gender	43	14%
Sexual orientation	22	7%
Other	206	66%

\* % of total offensive behaviour, same person of the 311 who had experienced harassment could have been exposed to several incidents

A further matter to note, is that the question about, who did something, had a response category 'Prefer not to answer'. This category was used by around 10% of the relevant respondents.

The study shows that a considerable number of respondents have experienced unwanted sexual attention (Table 11).

**Table 11: Harassing behaviour of a sexual nature experienced at least once during the past year**

	Men		Women		Total		Response No.
	No	% *	No.	% *	No.	%	
Unwanted sexual comments on body/clothes/lifestyle	145	6%	88	26%	235	8%	2,929
Unwanted physical contact with sexual undertones	50	2%	54	16%	106	4%	2,907
Unwanted requests for a date, even after a previous refusal	23	1%	44	13%	68	2%	2,907
Someone tells stories with sexual content that is experienced as uncomfortable	127	5%	48	14%	179	6%	2,886
Someone speaks disrespectfully about others	366	14%	109	33%	483	17%	2,886

\* % of men and women respondents respectively.  
Respondents answered the 5 questions individually and could have answered 'yes' to several questions.

This applies for both sexes, but it is much more frequent among women. Almost one in four women have experienced unwelcome sexual comments about body/clothes/lifestyle, and around one in six women have experienced unwanted physical contact with sexual undertones. It is important to note that these incidents were also reported by a considerable number of men.

Stories with sexual content that were experienced as uncomfortable, as well as disrespectful references by others were reported by around 400 men and more than 100 women. For women, this corresponds to more than one in three.

2846 of 2865 respondents replied 'no' to the question about exposure to either rape or attempted rape in the last 12 months. Further data processing of this response is not possible with the present data basis.

### **Initiatives over the last 12 months**

62% of respondents say that they have received information about how cases are reported, and 46% have participated in training, although they report that e-learning is not enough to change attitudes. There are calls for more information and more specific tools for use onboard. 44% are aware of the existence of a hotline, and 45% know that they can contact the Danish Maritime Authority.

24% of seafarers have noticed a change to a large extent with regard to bullying and harassment over the past year, while 24% have noticed some change. 27% have noticed that this change has improved the work environment onboard to a large extent, and 25% have noticed this to some extent.

## 06 Qualitative data

This section draws on qualitative data in the form of quotes obtained from interviews (informants) and from the free-text comments / open questions in the questionnaire (respondents). 32 people took part in the survey; 21 seafarers and 11 shore-based informants. 24 people were from the volunteer sample and 8 were from the selected group.

### Bullying and harassment

#### Summary

- Informants (interviews) and respondents (questionnaire) in the study report a widespread culture of bullying in the Danish merchant fleet.
- Bullying seems primarily to be aimed at the young and new arrivals.
- Primarily senior officers offend younger seafarers.
- Harassment is aimed at men and women and against different nationalities.
- Seafarers employed in the Danish fleet experience inequality in contractual agreements across different nationalities.
- Reports point to various challenges in the fleet with regard to the diversity of nationalities.
- Seafarers experience serious symptoms as a result of either bullying or harassment.
- Informants and respondents need clearer communication from shipping companies regarding zero tolerance of bullying and harassment.
- Seafarers call for more specific tools that can be used aboard. Many experience reprisals, revenge or lack of support, when they try to say no or turn away.

Informants and respondents in the study report a widespread culture of bullying in the Danish merchant fleet. This culture is maintained by persons across the sector, particularly other seafarers, employees in shipping companies and others in the sector. This leads to various and sometimes serious psycho-social problems for seafarers who then continue to work on vessels, complain, or leave the sector.

Some respondents had different perceptions of conditions aboard, for example: *"I think conditions aboard are fine"*. However, most informants and respondents had the opposite experience: *"Bullying and harassment in the Danish merchant fleet? I think it's very common"* and *"It's everywhere"*.

Furthermore, both the informants and the respondents report hostile behaviour and lack of respect from flag-state inspectors, different managers ashore, stevedores, or port employees. Even though they do not interact frequently with these actors, their

behaviour is experienced as severe or brutal.

The characteristics of this culture of bullying are described in more detail in the following sub-section.

#### Bullying

One informant reported that a culture of bullying in the Danish fleet was part of life at sea, and that it was accepted by the majority: *"It's because that's what the culture is. That's how we are with each other. It's quite okay to say certain things."* However, not all seafarers accept this culture, and many are afraid to talk about it, as one informant put it: *"Most are a little afraid to stand up and say something"*.

The most prominent reason for bullying and harassment, according to the informants, was poor management, with a lack of experience, knowledge, and tools to manage bullying and harassment

problems. One informant talked about how officers lack the ability to change the culture or manage a sudden bad atmosphere: *"So it just happens; this bullying and bad atmosphere, and bad management"*.

The informants not only referred to captains when they talked about poor management, many also talked about abuse of power by both male and female officers as another important reason for bullying. Some respondents and informants reported how some senior officers bend the system merely to pursue personal squabbles. Ratings can be told to perform random, sometimes unnecessary tasks.

There were also reports of a lack of relevant training in both the basic education system and from the shipping companies' side in relation to the complexity of tasks and the responsibility for operation of the vessels. As one informant put it:

*"We actually have more power than the others; than managers ashore, and even so we haven't got the training. It's so minimal, and we're trying to cope with just our seafarer qualifications; so very, very little. You'd never hire a manager ashore unless he had some sort of management qualification and training."*

### **The dynamics of bullying**

Many of the informants talked about how bullying typically involved more than two people. It was often a group, sometimes the entire crew. One informant put it as follows:

*"It's much more fun if you can get three or four people to laugh with you", and "When a seafarer isn't popular, they can become the target of bullying."*

Both informants and respondents describe how the challenges in adapting to life aboard can be contributory factors to bullying. Indifference from the crew or management or mistrust from shipping companies can hamper wellbeing and cause a person to feel excluded and isolated. As was discussed in several interviews, this is a problem for new seafarers who have difficulty fitting in: *"There aren't many places to seek comfort,"* was mentioned, and: *"You can't just go home, for example, when you don't feel welcome and that sort of thing"*.

Bullying can begin with teasing, joking, and initiation ceremonies for new arrivals aboard, as described here: *"There were many 'pranks' and the like, where it could be fun as long as it was against someone else"*. Teasing that escalates, as several respondents reported: *"You know, when you're going around taking the piss out of someone and suddenly it just*

*boils over"*. A joke can also be tampering with personal protective equipment: *"It could be something like putting caustic soda in people's protective gloves, you know? "*. It can develop, and it continues over time.

Besides the causes already mentioned, there were repeated examples of bullying from informants and respondents. For example, informants and respondents said:

*"Forced to lie about the condition of the vessel and otherwise be stamped as unwilling, which puts a stop to your career."*

*"They moved away from me when we sat down in the mess."*

*"And people started to ignore the person and make fun of them behind their back or even in front of them by using specific references they didn't know about."*

### **Harassment**

Some respondents have never experienced harassment, but several informants and respondents in the study expressed the opposite. One informant only mentioned a few cases of harassment after thirty years in the fleet. However, it was most common that informants had either experienced or witnessed harassment, and several believed that it is widespread in the fleet: *"We believe that the harassment is more widespread than we actually realise"*. One of the reasons why informants believe it is so widespread is the lack of knowledge: *"It's because people don't know what to do"*, and some are afraid to speak up.

The study points to two of the protected categories according to the definition of harassment that were mentioned in connection with experiencing and witnessing harassment. These were gender and race, including national culture.

### **Cultural factors**

Informants and respondents reported intimidating and hostile behaviour targeted at different national cultures in the crew across the Danish merchant fleet: *"They talk really badly to them."* Informants and respondents mentioned several times: *"Old white Danish men create an extremely hostile atmosphere for non-whites"*, and: *"Discrimination on board still exists"*. These problems were indicated in connection with behaviour towards non-Danes, in particular by Danish officers aboard.

Racism was also mentioned by both respondents and informants: *"Racism should end"*, and they talk about



a deeply anchored hierarchical system:

*"That's where we want to characterise it as bullying or harassment. But because, where they come from, it's normal for the white man to be top of the hierarchy, Indians and Filipinos and Bangladeshis, they know, they know their place, and it sounds really hard, but, but there is a ranking, and that's something we want in Denmark".*

Structural differences contribute to maintaining this as a problem in fleet: *"Some employees in the Danish fleet on voyage or temporary contracts depend on earning money so much that they will put up with a lot before they complain".*

Differences in contracts raise concerns in some, as one informant reported: *"You have a second marine engineer from Denmark with a 12-week contract, and then you have the Filipino with five or five months. Why's that?"*.

These comments indicate inequality in employment and different cultural understandings that create distance between seafarers and potential under-reporting of incidents because some are afraid of losing their jobs. The reports also point to various challenges in the fleet with regard to the diversity of nationalities.

### **Gender-related factors**

There have been a number of cases of harassment in the sector over the past 12 months involving gender-related problems. As one informant recalled: *"Last year we had a harassment case and a lawyer was involved, but the case was never confirmed".* Another respondent remembered: *"Two specific cases with lawyers involved".* These cases ended with the court agreeing with the claimant regarding harassing behaviour by the defendant.

However, female seafarers also reported difficulties in finding help if they are sexually harassed. As several said:

*"I couldn't go to the captain of the ship where I was having a bad time because he was one of the people after me".*

This is an indication that it is most often senior officers who harass female seafarers, and it is problematic that these are same people who are to take a complaint further according to the current regulations.

However, the sexual harassment the informants talk about does not just affect women, as one informant

explained: *"There's also sexual exploitation between men".* Lack of knowledge and uncertainty about what to do is a problem, say the informants, when men are victims. One informant talked about feeling inadequate in terms of being able to deal with the situation:

*"If a seafarer is harassed because of their sexual preferences, I mean as a homosexual, and you say that you'll take action if it happens again. But it's as if you're in this situation, and you want to do something, but you don't know what to do and who to go to for help".*

Respondents described a lack of the ability to create an inclusive work environment: *"... it still doesn't feel like it's a good place to work for women and homosexuals".*

One aspect of cases of harassment can also include spectators, who, against their will, become witnesses to what is taking place. Seafarers also talk about this as a problem that is hard for them to deal with:

*"... you might end up just watching. You're not directly involved, but you can end up being subjected to a situation",* and: *"Actually it's very uncomfortable when you see what's going on".*

Informants experience unfair treatment of female crew members and transgender seafarers. One informant expressed it as follows: *"The older ones also have a distorted idea about whether women should be at sea at all".* This also applies for some nationalities in the merchant fleet, as some explain: *"... they just believe that girls don't belong here, and that they either belong in the kitchen or in bed with their legs spread".*

The #MeToo movement has recently helped reinforce the debate and awareness of sexual abuse, and it has encouraged women to come forward with their complaints, including in the fleet. However, the movement has also made the debate about having more women aboard vessels more complex, and this makes it difficult for some to know what to do and how to deal with diversity and gender equality among the crew. Some officers fear that a case could be raised against them, and this causes them to avoid interacting with women. This leads to new challenges with women being isolated, as one informant reported.

## Unwanted sexual attention

### Experienced personally

Many men and women experience unwanted advances, often disguised as friendly jokes, as one informant explained:

*"He [a senior officer] could say for example: 'I want to be with you. But you apparently don't want to'. He could really say that out loud, in front of others. He had no problems with it whatsoever".*

The quote suggests that the young officer found it unpleasant.

Primarily junior officers or ratings are subjected to unwanted verbal advances and unwanted physical contact from senior officers, as an informant reports: *"He [a senior officer] was there [on Facebook] with questions about what I did. [...] at one time he asked me: 'don't you like me writing here?' and I replied: 'No, I don't like it. I don't.' But he kept on".*

The hierarchy and asymmetric power structure make it difficult for young seafarers to say "no". Several report reprisals they have experienced when they did say "no", such as no support in work situations or even direct retribution. As one informant explained:

*"He didn't speak to me anymore, he didn't smile, he wasn't fun. And he found all sorts of mistakes in my work area, as if everything that went wrong was in my area and nowhere else".*

This put considerable pressure on the working relationship.

Two junior officers spoke about how they tried to keep out of unpleasant situations in which older officers made advances. It is clear that the young seafarers feel that their boundaries are being crossed, but they also try to avoid conflict, as in the following situations:

*"He [an officer] made an advance to me. He came on the bridge while I was on watch, with some sort of excuse. He made coffee and talked to me. He was friendly. I was courteous. He was nice up to the point when he took my shoulder and began to sing love songs in a way - like for fun. As soon as he touched me, I said: 'Stop, now! I don't like this. I won't have it.' To me, he was crossing my borders. I wouldn't put up with it".*

The informant continued: *"He apologised, but the next day he continued. As if it was a kind of game".*

## Witnessed

Witnesses talk about episodes in which colleagues have been subjected to advances and where they themselves have been present or they have heard about it. These episodes could involve uninvited guests in a cabin:

*"There was this person who went into her cabin and began touching her, or there was someone lying in their bunk at night when they come down after a watch".*

Other informants talk about officers with a master key who go into others' cabins without being invited, as one informant described it:

*"So, some people have made it a habit to put a chair under the door handle. She sent me a photo, and it was one of the boys. Young men also have to put a chair under their door handle".*

There may also be situations when others talk about their female colleagues in a sexist manner. As mentioned above, because the verbal assaults often come as jokes, and often from a superior, it can be difficult to say anything or do something about them, as one informant explained:

*"I could say no and confront them on the spot, but then the remainder of the voyage wouldn't be much fun for me".*

Some informants describe how the tone of communication aboard can be offensive, as in the following example: *"The senior officer makes a lot of lewd insinuations/jokes. Mostly for fun. But he also crosses the line now and then".*

## Avoidance

Young seafarers have developed various strategies to avoid exposing themselves to unwanted sexual attention and advances. They also try to manage the advances themselves by saying no in the situation.

In general, female seafarers take care of themselves. They avoid seeming provocative or inviting. For most, it is about keeping largely to themselves outside work contexts: *"I prefer to keep a low profile and refrain from doing anything that could make them think that I'm available".*

This means that they avoid taking part in social activities, for example: *"It's as if people think that I'm odd on Saturday evenings, for example, when we're having a barbecue party, I just eat up and go back to my cabin when I've finished".*

Another informant talked about how she is very careful about her clothing to avoid attracting attention: *"I've been on a ship with a pool for four months, but I've never used it. I never wear less than shorts and a T-shirt"*.

Some try to use humour, which is not always enough to make men understand that they have gone too far, as one informant put it: *"Yes. They don't really know how to deal with a rejection"*.

### Consequences of bullying and harassment

Bullying and harassment lead to many different problems with wellbeing and serious mental health symptoms. These symptoms can occur as a reaction to experiencing bullying and harassment themselves, being witness to it, or because of a feeling of not being able to do something about it when it occurs. These problems lead to poor wellbeing for seafarers:

*"Bullying can change a person who is so kind at first, and it can make him so depressed. And, you know, so lost"*. Another informant talked about experiencing consequences after having left the vessel:

*"When I came home, I realised I was under pressure. I lived it. I mean, my body knew it, I became ill as soon as I came ashore. I was so tired and emotionally drained"*.

The problems have also caused many seafarers to leave the sector.

Poor mental health in seafarers affects their ability to work on board, as one informant described it: *"I'd say that if I'm not great mentally, they can't get the best out of me"*. Mental health issues and welfare problems are also a safety risk, as another informant suggested: *"It can be very dangerous if you're not well mentally, ... it's still very risky environment"*.

Informants talk about the consequences for their mental health and wellbeing. These symptoms are described by informants as serious.

## Risk factors

### Summary

Respondents and informants point to several risk factors:

- The qualitative results show that the factors can be divided into physical, structural and personal factors:
  - Isolation
  - Fatigue
  - Home sickness and sexual desire
  - Poor management
  - The new, the young and the different
  - Culture or personality
- The quantitative results show that the most common targets are the youngest age group under 31 years, women, those with the shortest sailing experience, junior officers and seafarers on cargo vessels.

This section reports on the responses about risk factors that can be derived from respondents' replies to the questionnaire as well as informants' replies in interviews. According to the quantitative results, the most vulnerable group for bullying and harassment are persons under 31 years, women, people with shorter sailing experience, junior officers, and specifically within the cargo segment. The questionnaire does not indicate what makes these groups more exposed. However, when asked directly about risk factors, the informants mention a number

of factors that contribute to an unhealthy work environment with a risk of bullying and harassment. Some respondents also describe risk factors in the free-text fields, and these descriptions refer to the same factors. These factors include a combination of physical, structural, and personal elements, and are presented below.

## Risk factors in the Danish fleet

### Isolation

Isolation is the factor that most informants and respondents mention can trigger bullying and harassment. Particularly long signing-on periods in which the crew are close together in both work and leisure situations: *"There's 15 of us. We see each other every day, [...] That makes big demands of your social skills"*.

It can be difficult to defuse a conflict precisely because you cannot distance yourself from each other onboard: *"If someone's after you, you can't get away" - "You can't get physically away from a person"*.

### Fatigue

Fatigue is another factor frequently highlighted. Pressure of work and lack of sleep because of bad weather or a voyage with many calls at port, for example, contribute to lower tolerance and less energy for socialising: *"There's no energy for the good conversation, and you're quicker to criticize or point a finger"*.

Fatigue makes people less empathic and more irritable: *"You get tired at some stage, and then it starts to be fun to go around and get at each other"*.

Changing watches and possibly changing time zones increases the pressure: *"Our day-night rhythm is changing all the time. You're under pressure. It's easier to get stressed, people become annoyed and maybe start criticising each other"*.

### Home sickness and sexual desire

Some mention that homesickness and sexual desire arise as a consequence of the many weeks away from home: *"You miss company. You miss intimacy with someone"*. Informants try to explain how missing people back home is channelled into inappropriate behaviour aboard:

*"But you know, we're over in the sexual. Because you feel isolated. Sexual frustrations are exacerbated because you're away from home. That's what I've heard most about if there are women aboard"*.

There is therefore a risk of bullying and harassment, but also a risk of unwanted sexual attention as a consequence of long periods aboard: *"Some can't control themselves"*.

## Poor management

Poor management is a risk factor reported by many informants and written about by many respondents. The captain is the authority aboard; the person crews refer to and expect support from. Management is reported on in the following work environment section.

### The new, the young and the different

The new, the young, and the different, including new arrivals, the young and minorities, are vulnerable and easy victims according to reports from informants and respondents. Examples highlighted are sexuality and gender: *"It was like that cook who was a homosexual, yeah? And women at sea are also different, you know?"*.

However, anyone perceived as less competent is in the risk group: *"There'll also be some sort of bullying if there's a difference in what you can or can't do physically"*.

The isolated workplace increases the risk because it is not possible to avoid an assault: *"If you don't get on well with someone aboard or if you rub each other up wrong way, you can't just go home"*.

There are many opinions about whether specific nationalities or different nationalities aboard poses a risk in itself. Some respondents said:

*"No, that's not the culture at all. I'm telling you, it's personality. It depends on your character", and: "Oh there're good people and bad people in all cultures. You can't say it's a specific nationality"*.

This could be interpreted as that people with a specific personality entail a risk of bullying or harassment. However, several respondents and informants made strong statements that culture does constitute a risk:

*"[The shipping company should] send the captain and other officers on courses about how you treat your crew aboard. There're some cultures they hate in particular", and: "Discrimination based on nationality or race"*.

### No particular risk

Finally, some informants and respondents also believe that vessels do not constitute a more exposed environment than other workplaces.



# Work environment

## Summary

- Social relationships, inclusion, management, and workload are linked in particular to bullying and harassment.
- Social relationships can serve as a protective factor when a crew have good relationships, but also a marginalising factor if relationships falter.
- Senior officers are responsible for establishing an inclusive work environment, but not all are sufficiently well trained for this management task.

The interviews (informants) and the free-text fields in the questionnaires (respondents) provide a mixed picture of the participants' general perception of their work environment. A rather large proportion express satisfaction, while the others think there are challenges. Finally, many are of the opinion that the work environment at their workplace is problematic.

There are differences between the views expressed by minority and majority employees, but not between respondents and informants. There are the same viewpoints and the same differences from both sources of data.

The following section describes the work environment factors that are particularly relevant in relation to bullying and harassment.

## Social relationships

The informants' reports indicate that a particular social community forms in crews at sea, and this can serve as a support during the isolation and help manage conflicts. However, according to the informants, this community can also lead to social control, and the threat of reprisals or exclusion constitutes a barrier to expressing disapproval or taking a distance from bullying and harassment. Some state that they miss the social community that they once had. Several senior officers say that they wish they had more time or competences to initiate, or even participate in, social activities onboard.

Informants also highlight that coexistence aboard requires a particular set of social skills, whereby you can both interact with others and subordinate yourself. As one person said, you need *"a big no-worries button"*.

Some find it difficult to establish good relationships in mixed crews, and generations, gender, and nationalities were mentioned as barriers that are

difficult to overcome. The informant below, for example, would like guidelines for interaction between genders in crews with both men and women:

*"I mean all that about signals, or misunderstanding signals, you know? That's been a problem too. If you've got a woman aboard, who's maybe a bit more frivolous and has been with some of the men, that can cause some jealousy and division. We've got no guidelines in the company about dating aboard the ship"*.

Some young informants report a harsh tone that seems out of place in a modern workplace, while some older informants talk about young people who are particularly sensitive and take things too personally. Among the respondents, many write that they have good cooperation onboard, although some, like the informants, also write about cultural clashes. These may be related to attempts to implement organisational changes, as one respondent wrote:

*"The work environment goes wrong when people from other management companies are hired and apply their own principles"*.

Or it may relate to integrating new arrivals, as one respondent said: *"When they recruit new people, they have to understand that culture aboard is not the same as the culture in the shipping company they come from"*.

## Inclusion

*"A very conservative sector"*, and *"incredibly male-dominated"*, are two of the phrases our informants use to characterise Danish shipping. The informants point out that the male-dominated environment entails certain challenges such as non-availability of appropriate protective equipment in the right size and lack of access to hygiene products for women.

Many informants speak of a need to innovate in order to include minority seafarers such as the young, new arrivals, women and non-Danish seafarers. One senior officer informant contributed this reflection:

*"We've had a wrong view of how we treat women and how we treat the youngsters who come to sea".*

Other informants had views that provide an understanding of why it is such a hard task. For example, a senior officer said that he thinks that having to include women in an unsuitable environment is a difficult task:

*"Now we're talking about diversity, I think one defines it slightly incorrectly, and we're imposed with a role onboard which belongs elsewhere. I think it's great that there's more women onboard, they do a lot of good for the work environment. It's just that work at sea is not for everyone, because the physical framework puts a tough psychological strain on crews".*

Another respondent wrote a similar perspective on how women receive positive discrimination:

*"There's a big difference between a man and a woman onboard, particularly when it comes to docking, the managers only put men on the hard work".*

One respondent highlighted the difference between the intentions from ashore and the reality out on the vessels with regard to inclusion:

*"Despite the diversity initiatives and campaigns from the office ashore, it's still not a workplace that welcomes women and homosexuals very well".* In line with this, non-Danish informants stated that they meet senior officers who take out their frustrations about globalisation of the shipping workforce on non-Danish colleagues:

*"Many older Danish senior officers bear a grudge against colleagues with another nationality for taking their jobs. They make a lot of negative comments about other nations".*

An informant said that inclusion is a management task, and that senior officers should take the lead to make the cultural changes necessary to secure an inclusive work environment in all workplaces in the merchant fleet.

## **Management**

Many informants talked about their experiences with senior officers, who, according to the informants, are not qualified for their tasks and whose managerial style is outdated. On the other hand, many informants

have also had positive experiences with senior officers who do understand cultural differences and attune their communication to individual needs. A senior-officer informant said that an inclusive management style is demanding:

*"You have to be \*\*\*\* careful. They're not very good at taking criticism. So you have to do this in a very special way if you want to make them not lose face and get sad. On a modern vessel, you actually have to be very good at reading cultural differences".*

Cultural differences may also make the management role difficult because crew members do not come to management with their problems. A senior officer described such a situation, when a member of the crew lost his small son in an accident but didn't tell anyone about it. The informant only became aware of it through a third party, and then could organise sending the man home.

Several senior officers would like to see a management training programme so that they can perform their role better. The hierarchical structure of the organisation puts additional pressure on senior officers as role models. Many informants describe how employees lowest down in the hierarchy, including new employees, women, and people in lower ranks, are vulnerable to harassment and bullying when senior officers are not able to act as role models for inclusion.

Many respondents also commented on managerial style, for example one wrote: *"Senior officers should stop bullying and making degrading comments".*

## **Workload**

Several informants stress the excessively heavy workload for subordinates and officers. Documentation and paperwork requirements are mentioned as a particular burden for officers. For subordinates, long working hours cause challenges. The heavy workload adds pressure to a work environment with no resources to develop the management task or deal with emerging conflicts.

Furthermore, several respondents mention that the unequal conditions under which they are employed amount to a structural injustice that can lead to a negative atmosphere:

*"Then there's the fact that some are out for much longer than others. People with long contracts can't keep up the same pace all the way because they get tired. But even so, officers expect a 110% effort, and this leads to harassment".*

# Current initiatives

## Summary

- Respondents and informants find that efforts and initiatives by Danish shipping companies to combat bullying and harassment vary considerably.
- Many seafarers welcome the new initiatives in their company and are optimistic about the greater focus stimulated by the initiatives. Others are more sceptical.
- There is call for more national regulation on the psychosocial work environment that could support initiatives by individual shipping companies.
- Several informants and respondents note that campaigns, policies, procedures and initiatives have been implemented by some shipping companies.
- Online courses with multiple-choice answers are not considered by seafarers as a learning method that can change values regarding bullying and harassment.
- It has been noted that a transformation at some shipping companies is underway, but it is believed that the change will take time.

Responses from study informants are generally varied. Some are optimistic about the measures they have experienced in their respective shipping companies or onboard, while others have had negative experiences or not observed any changes at all. Others express doubts about effect of the current efforts. Reactions range from:

*"I can see no reason for optimism that the initiatives will work" to "I think things are better now. It's as if there's greater awareness and, you know, a lot is happening".*

Shipping companies are at different stages of development with regard to preventing bullying and harassment onboard. For example, one informant talked about how their company was actively seeking contact with other shipping companies to obtain more information: *"There's this big and recognised company where they already have procedures and systems. So we're contacting them, and perhaps we'll start something ourselves".*

Another informant said: *"I have no idea about the other companies. I mean, even when I talk to people from different ranks, you know, even at home, I have some friends, some are even chief engineers. We just meet up, and the way they view bullying and harassment is totally different from what I see".*

Many report that major shipping companies have policies, procedures, and initiatives: *"Maersk and companies like that have had campaigns".* These campaigns raise awareness and are considered an eye-opener:

*"We've run a campaign on psychological safety in the company, and it's opened our eyes to things we never saw before".*

One respondent mentioned how the shipping company focus had led to a change such that the company demanded respect for women, and this led to a better atmosphere aboard: *"The bar for what's acceptable has been lowered",* as one respondent remarked. Some companies have launched training programmes, including in connection with safety procedures onboard. Informants report that they take part in such e-learning courses, which also contain multiple-choice questions: *"There are also courses with a sort of film you watch, or a multi-choice test or something else that's not face to face".* Despite completing this type of course, many respondents do not find the tools and the knowledge they need, and they say they need more:

*"Yes, but some want to have the tools to manage situations aboard. I mean captains and senior officers usually want to learn how they can deal with this".*

The respondents who reacted positively to the information programmes mentioned, especially courses that contained cases and an opportunity to discuss the examples in order to raise awareness of the issues.

Many informants mentioned safety meetings held onboard, at which they can talk about bullying and harassment: *"There's focus on bullying and harassment, and this is something we talk about at meetings and at weekly safety meetings".* Informants

say that they can take the matter up at these meetings, but they find it difficult to define exactly how this takes place, and many admit that it is hard to talk about.

Trade unions, flag states, and some shipping companies state that they carry out information campaigns on complaints procedures in relation to bullying and harassment: *"A campaign about the psychosocial work environment was launched in 2021... so clearly focus on this had an effect"*. However, other informants say: *"Many people don't know about the possibilities to get help from the DMA"*.

The seafarers express a need for more action from stakeholders in the sector.

### Preventive measures

Several shipping companies have introduced preventive measures to generate awareness of the problem of unwanted sexual attention. Some generate awareness by distributing posters on vessels and conducting online courses, videos and seminars.

However, several informants consider these initiatives

have little effect as they do not feel engaged by seeing yet another half-hour video and then answering the associated multiple-choice tests. Despite this, it was mentioned repeatedly in several interviews that there is focus on bullying and harassment, and several companies have declared that it is completely unacceptable, with zero tolerance towards bullying and harassment: *"But they do say that there's zero tolerance towards it"*.

The respondents to the questionnaire survey made similar statements. There are campaigns with focus on awareness of bullying and harassment, and there were reports of increasing awareness: *"People are starting to realise that it's no longer just a joke"*. Several informants explained how companies have launched campaigns, various social events, courses on psychological safety, free internet, and work on creating a good atmosphere among crew and a more flat structure onboard vessels, all aiming to improve the work environment aboard. One respondent also mentioned the reorganisation of work processes onboard as a way to reduce stress levels among the crew and thus reduce possibilities for bullying and harassment.

## Case processing

### Summary

- Doubt, lack of courage, fear, and senior officers who cover for each other are given as reasons for informants not reporting bullying and harassment.
- Some shipping companies have established guidelines for reporting, in other places there is a lack of knowledge about where or to whom bullying and harassment should be reported.
- There seems to be a severe lack of more and better information about complaints policies and processes for seafarers.
- There is a large difference between how shipping companies deal with reports about bullying, harassment, and unwanted sexual attention.
- Respondents want more uniformity across the fleet with regard to managing bullying and harassment.
- E-learning does not promote adequate learning to change values.

This section is about how the sector has managed reported or unreported cases of bullying and harassment as well as cases of unwanted sexual attention in the merchant fleet.

Several seafarers indicate that bullying and harassment instances are never reported due to various bottle-neck problems. This could be because the captain or senior officers are part of the problem,



either because they themselves are the harassers, or because they lack the tools or training to deal with the problem.

There are reports that several shipping companies have introduced reporting schemes internally and through external cooperation partners such as Seahealth. The DMA also offers possibilities to report bullying and harassment via their website. Some are aware of this, but several have never heard about it.

Shipping companies' procedures for handling reported cases differ, and the experience of how cases of bullying, harassment and unwanted sexual attention are processed vary from case to case, and across the merchant fleet. There are reports of both positive and negative experiences of management onboard, as well as from the companies in general with regard to case processing.

## Reporting procedures

### Unreported incidents

Responses in this study mention doubt, lack of courage, fear, and too close relationships between officers within the senior management of the vessel as reasons for informants not reporting bullying and harassment. Some respondents omitted answering the questions and instead said they: *"Prefer not to answer"*.

Most shipping companies expect cases of bullying and harassment onboard to be reported to the captain. However, many say that they are hesitant about going to the captain because they are afraid, they will not be believed, or because it is difficult to produce evidence for their accusations. One informant put it as follows:

*"For example, if two of us are working together in one place, and I say to someone: 'this person is bullying me'. I mean, who's going to believe me?"*

Many find it hard to find the courage to complain, as an informant said: *"I didn't have the courage, at first, to go to the captain"*. Seafarers indicate that they need help to report a case.

Fear of reprisals from the shipping company, crew, or officers aboard were mentioned by informants who themselves had experienced bullying, as well as respondents who had witnessed it. They talked about fear as the reason for not talking about the incident, such as fear of being dismissed, fear of not having their contract extended, or fear of being bullied or being hit: *"I'm talking from experience. Men take their revenge. I mean, they'll hurt you in a way that you can't prove"*. It appears that it is not always best to go

to the captain: *"I complained to the captain, but he did nothing. He thought it was funny and laughed"*.

Close relationships between officers can also block complaints, because officers may be involved in the case, and because it can be difficult for officers to act in a case concerning a colleague with whom they have a close relationship. These unreported cases therefore remain onboard, and persons involved either live with it or they leave the sector, as both informants and respondents say.

## Reporting options

Some respondents explain that there is a DP ("designated person", or appointed responsible person) in the shipping company, and others refer to Seahealth's hotline, and the DMA as places to report bullying and harassment and get help. Some informants say that the shipping company do a lot to make sure that everyone knows their DP, so that in the event of an incident people have a face for a person they can go to. Some companies have established a hotline for complaints about bullying and harassment - a whistleblower scheme - and respondents and informants regard it as positive that something is being done about the problem.

There were different reactions about Seahealth's hotline. One informant said: *"Of course we've informed our personnel and [...] we've asked them to contact us or Seahealth's hotline, for example"*.

However, many informants would like to see more specific information and tools for use aboard vessels, and this is reflected in the following comment: *"A telephone hotline is all well and good, but you have to be able to deal with the situation onboard and be sure that it's followed up on"*.

An informant described their experience with the case processing at Seahealth as follows: *"I rang Seahealth to get help, and they said that they were only volunteers. So a psychologist they had, called me. But nothing else happened"*.

This informant was not referred to other places and did not receive further help after this one call. Others have not perceived Seahealth as an option for help in cases of bullying or harassment: *"Yes, I remember there was something about Seahealth, and I'd never thought about it before, [...] for me they're more about sports and well-being"*.

## **Experience of case processing for reports of bullying and harassment**

Many informants and respondents mentioned their company's commitment in the struggle against bullying and harassment.

There were reports in the study about stricter initiatives against the perpetrators of bullying and harassment within the past year: *"Things are calming down now and the person was removed. He was fired last week"*. Some shipping companies send representatives onboard to assist the management in dealing with reported cases: *"A representative from the shipping company, a person from the office here, showed up on the ship"*.

Seafarers who have already experienced and reported cases of bullying or harassment have very different experiences, depending on the shipping company they are employed by. Some have received help and support from their company after reporting a case: *"The company was very supportive, and I felt they understood"*.

Another informant was very grateful for the way in which the case was dealt with: *"[...] they sent me an email when the investigation was finished, and they had reached a conclusion [...] my accusation was correct, and I had every right to complain"*.

However, other informants had negative experiences: *"There's not much to indicate that the companies, or anyone in general, is any good at dealing with this"*. They have experienced that their complaint has not led to any solution: *"He's reported it, but no one's taken any action"*. Case processing is often perceived as very slow. However, this has consequences because crews are regularly changed and replaced:

*"In my opinion, they took a very long time to react... So, we were very disappointed because we were all ready to testify"*.

In other cases, conflicts about bullying or harassment are resolved by crew members being moved from one vessel to another in the company, sometimes with no explanation:

*"On that ship, my colleague and I were moved, but they weren't. We were not to go back to that ship. I don't know why, but I think it's something to do with the conflict we had"*.

Another informant expressed frustration with their shipping company about the way a case was dealt with:

*"I experienced an attempted stabbing by another seafarer who, yeah, we know that there were other*

*incidents with him, but he could stay onboard, because he was a really good welder"*.

Many informants and respondents talked about cases which were not dealt with satisfactorily, and how they left a shipping company because of bullying and harassment. Some know where to turn, but far too many seafarers experience poor complaint management procedures, and a lack of confidence in the complaints system: *"But I'd say that most of them have no confidence in the system"*.

## **Experience of case processing for reports of unwanted sexual attention**

Informants explain how they try to support their colleagues morally and with regard to complaints or reports to the captain as the young officer says here:

*"There were two female crew aboard who were offended by an officer who spread untrue rumours of a sexual nature about them. [...] One asked me for support and help to go to the captain and file a complaint with the office"*.

The study has several examples of victim blaming, when the victim of harassment is often fired, excluded from the social activities, or transferred away from the vessel. The young seafarer mentioned in the following, who was subjected to harassment, was signed off, and the perpetrator remained in their position:

*"This is an experienced seafarer [the perpetrator], who we reckon is harder to give up than she is. So she's no longer onboard"*.

In this case, the problem was solved by signing off the young seafarer, but in other cases there are reports of support, for example from a senior officer who supported a younger officer until it was possible find a sustainable solution. One informant had support from the ship's management and competent case processing:

*"When I had reported a complaint [against the officer], the captain had to be present at watch changes,*

*because I took over from the chief officer The captain just came up onto the bridge and talked about other things. He never revealed why he was there. And OK, so I felt safe because he blocked interaction between me and him [the officer]"*.

Some female informants speak of receiving good support from their company, which does not accept unwanted sexual attention, as can be seen in the following:

*"And we had a really good manager at the office at*

*that time, so I phoned, and after five minutes I was told that I would never have to return to that ship again”.*

In general, case processing of reports of unwanted sexual attention is experienced very differently. There are both positive experiences and cases where processing is experienced as slow and unsatisfactory.

### **The role of the sector**

There are reports of high expectations that shipping companies and Blue Denmark will deal with issues regarding bullying and harassment together. Seafarers expect help to deal with situations that may arise onboard, including support from shipping companies to manage the perpetrator and care for victims. They also expect help from the DMA, which is responsible for the work environment in the merchant fleet, as well as from educational institutions.

### **Shipping companies**

Several shipping companies have already reacted to the needs of seafarers and launched campaigns. However, some informants recognise that the cultural changes required will not be easy and will take time.

Several statements from both informants and respondents also focus on the responsibilities of shipping companies to employ senior officers with the necessary managerial competences. Seafarers, particularly senior officers, want more training in management and crisis management. In general, seafarers expect the shipping companies to screen officers before they are promoted and, where relevant, set an example by not promoting a perpetrator to demonstrate that such acts have consequences. Informants put it as follows:

*“I think that shipping companies should invite the senior officers to a meeting and explain that these complaints are simply unacceptable”.*

The informants express an expectation that shipping companies set an example: *“If you want confidence in the system, you have to set real examples. So, for example, this happened, and they did something about it”.*

Some seafarers have expressed a wish for more appreciation based on a feeling of a lack of respect from employees in shipping companies’ shore-based organisations. As some informants explained, it is about seafarers wanting to be treated with the same respect as shipping company employees ashore:

*“[...] instead of treating them like second-class people out there, because it also has an influence on their culture out there, that we’re just not important”.*

There are sceptics regarding the changes to be made, and doubts about whether it can have an effect, because many crew members are recruited through management companies which just: *“[...] send out people from all over the world on some ships; just put them together. They have no idea who they are”.*

### **Danish Maritime Authority**

The DMA is responsible for ensuring a good work environment on Danish flagged vessels. Responses in the study indicate a wish and an expectation for national regulation of the psychosocial work environment in the fleet, preferably more comprehensive than the MLC (Maritime Labour Convention). The DMA has already introduced a whistleblower scheme on its website, it is possible to report here and get help if required. However, as described above, many are not aware of this opportunity, and some indicate that it is difficult to find the form on the website.

It has also been mentioned that it would be nice to see further training requirements and procedures to manage bullying and harassment: *“Nothing has happened in the legislation, it would seem...”.*

### **Maritime education institutions**

Maritime education institutions should prepare upcoming officers, cadets, and the inexperienced for the work environment aboard vessels. Some respondents indicate a great need for education institutions and shipping to cooperate more on the transition from shore to sea. It is expressed here:

*“If there was something there worth taking away with you, it would be to throw out some feelers when you arrive onboard”.*

Others said: *“There’re still dinosaurs out there [who] don’t welcome new members of crew properly”.*

There is also a wish to upgrade both basic training and continuing training for officers within areas such as management, communication, on-boarding, bullying and harassment, as well as diversity management:

*“Management training - it’s unbelievable. We’re the absolute senior managers of this factory you call a ship, and actually we have more power officially than a national leader, but we don’t have much training. What we get from our maritime education is minimal.*

*Very, very little. You'd never hire a manager ashore without giving him management training. It'd never happen".*

Maritime education institutions have already introduced various elements in teaching, but there is still a need to provide more knowledge about what new recruits will meet aboard, and how they can deal with bullying and harassment.

## 07 Summary and concluding results

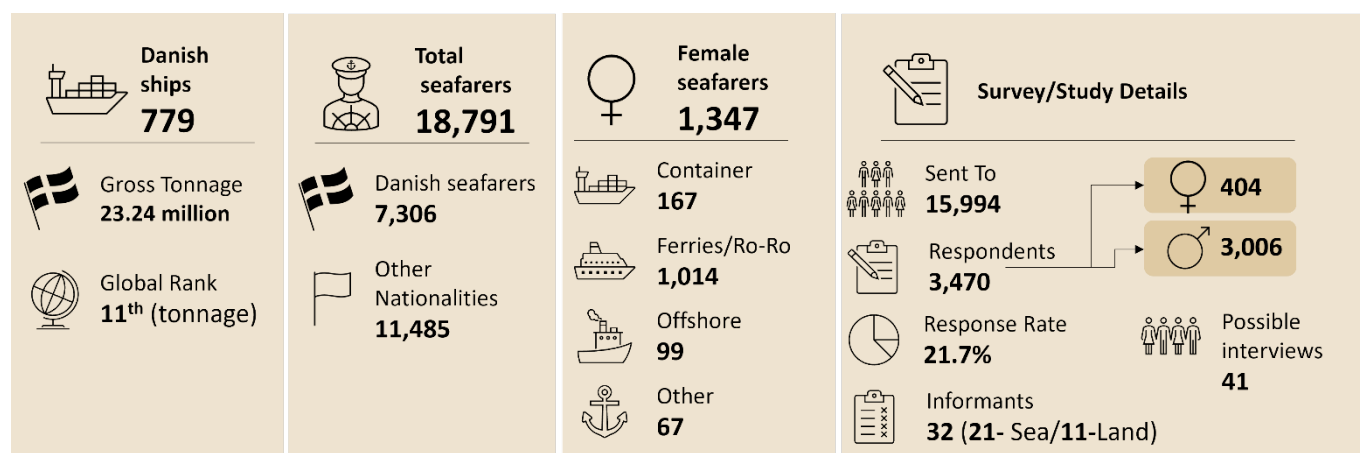
This report describes the results of the study of bullying and harassment in the Danish merchant fleet that was initiated by the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs in 2022, and carried out by the CMSS in 2023, between 1 February and 30 June. This section presents the combined results of the quantitative and qualitative data. Overall, these results contribute to a diversified understanding of bullying and harassment on Danish vessels.

The results describe the prevalence and risk factors of bullying and harassment in six different segments of the Danish merchant fleet and how reported and non-reported cases are managed. These results provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the incidence of bullying and harassment in the Danish fleet?
2. What are the risk factors of bullying and harassment in segments of the Danish fleet?
3. What approaches are utilised by shipping companies, including management and seafarers, to tackle bullying and harassment, and to promote mental health at the workplace? How are these efforts implemented in practice? And how are they experienced?
4. How has the sector or other stakeholders managed cases of reported or non-reported bullying and harassment in the Danish fleet?

As can be seen in the diagram below, Danish shipping consists of 779 vessels with a gross tonnage of 23.24 million (2022). Based on population data from 2022, 18,791 seafarers were employed in shipping companies. Of this population, Danish nationals constituted 38.9%, while 61.1% were international seafarers. The shipping companies examined employ seafarers on different types of vessels, including container vessels, cargo vessels, passenger vessels, offshore vessels, small national ferries and small private ferries. Note the relatively low level of the representation of female seafarers in the shipping companies at around 3% of the total number of seafarers.

**Figure 2; Participants in the study (Source Danish Shipping, 2021, 2022; BahDIS report 2023)**



### Participants in the study

A total of 3,470 seafarers answered the questionnaire, corresponding to a response rate of 21.7%. This high response rate provides good validity and enables study of sub-groups, such as age and shipping segment.



However, some cross-cutting analyses of small sub-groups are not included for validity reasons and the reliability of results.

The qualitative results are based on 32 in-depth interviews with informants who either contacted the project on the basis of a request in the questionnaire, or who were invited as representatives of sector organisations and segments. Furthermore, the comments from the questionnaire have been included in the qualitative material. Overall, the results are based on data from two different types of sources and a substantial number of persons, which strengthens the validity and the breadth of the results of the study.

## Results

The results are presented below for the project's four research questions.

**Research question 1:** Both the quantitative and qualitative results show a substantial number of cases of bullying and a widespread culture of bullying in the sector. Bullying, harassment, threats of violence and actual physical violence occur onboard vessels in the Danish merchant fleet. The total extent of these cases indicates that this is not a case of individual persons, individual shipping companies or individual segments, but rather it is endemic in the sector. More men are subjected to bullying and harassment in the fleet, but relatively speaking there are more women who experience harassment and unwanted sexual attention.

Questionnaire responses reported a substantial number of cases of bullying, harassment, unwanted sexual attention, threats of violence, and actual physical violence. The most vulnerable were the youngest age group under 31 years, women, new arrivals, junior officers and seafarers in the cargo segment. The least vulnerable are seafarers in the offshore segment, passenger vessels and ferries, as well as seafarers in small crews across segments. Numerically, most victims of violence, bullying and harassment are men, but there are far more men than women in the sector. As a percentage, a larger percentage of female employees' report violence, bullying and harassment. In two out of three cases, the perpetrator of harassment and violence was a senior officer or team leader. The perpetrator of bullying in more than one-half (60%) of the cases was a colleague at the same level, while in 30% of the cases, a senior officer perpetrated bullying.

The total number and scope of reported cases of threats of violence, bullying and harassment make it unlikely that the issue covers just individual people, individual shipping companies, or individual segments of the sector. In accordance with the overall scope described in the quantitative results, the qualitative results describe a broadly rooted culture of bullying, with an adverse impact on the mental health of many seafarers.

Many of the informants and respondents are very happy onboard Danish vessels, and many are positive about the initiatives launched to reduce bullying and harassment. A considerable percentage express satisfaction, while others find challenges in the work environment, and several point to a number of factors in the work environment that contribute to the incidence of bullying, harassment and unwanted sexual attention. The mixed crews have some innate structural factors such as differences in contracts, including signing on periods. There are also differences in promotion opportunities. Both can have an influence on bullying and harassment, as some groups can be particularly vulnerable and are reluctant to report bullying due to uncertain employment conditions and fear of losing their job. A number of seafarers need clearer communication from shipping companies regarding zero tolerance of bullying and harassment. There are also calls for more, and more specific, tools for use onboard. Seafarers want greater awareness of the composition of the crew from shipping companies and from foreign management firms.

Many seafarers explain that bullying usually involves several people, and often a group, sometimes the entire crew. Bullying can begin with teasing, joking, and initiation ceremonies for new arrivals onboard, but they then escalate. Examples of bullying include avoidance of persons in the mess, so they eat alone, ignoring, teasing, ridiculing and making an exhibition of the individual in front of the rest of the crew. Harassment is a challenge, especially in relation to gender, culture, and race. There are reports of intimidating and hostile behaviour targeted at different nationalities across the fleet, racist remarks and behaviour are mentioned, which can be regarded as a manifestation of the strongly hierarchical system. There are also reports of harassment of women, men, homosexual and transsexual seafarers, as well as of old-fashioned opinions, intimidating behaviour and distorted

perceptions of sexuality and women's role at sea.

2846 out of 2865 respondents replied 'no' to the question about exposure to either rape or attempted rape within the last 12 months. Further processing of this response is not possible on the current basis.

**Research question 2:** The risk factors can be divided into physical, structural, and personal factors. The most important factors, mentioned by both informants and respondents, are isolation, fatigue, homesickness and sexual desire, poor management, newly arrived, young and different seafarers, as well as different nationalities. The challenges in adapting to life aboard can also be contributory factors. These factors can make seafarers vulnerable to bullying and harassment.

**Research question 3:** The results indicate that seafarers experience very different ongoing initiatives to deal with bullying and harassment. They report that some companies have established guidelines for reporting bullying and harassment, while in other places there is a lack of knowledge about where or to whom and incidents should be reported. 62% of respondents state that they have received information about how cases are to be reported, and 46% have taken part in training, even though they report that e-learning is not enough to change attitudes. There is a wish for more information and more specific tools that can be used aboard. 44% are aware of the existence of a hotline, 45% are aware that they can contact the Danish Maritime Authority.

24% of respondents have noticed a change to a great extent with regard to bullying and harassment during the past year, while 24% have noticed some change. 27% have noticed that this change has improved the work environment onboard, and 25% have noticed an improvement to some extent.

The seafarers report a particular social community in crews at sea, that can serve as a support during the isolation and help manage conflicts. However, this community can also lead to social control, and the threat of reprisals or exclusion constitute an obstacle in distancing oneself from bullying and harassment. Management was mentioned as a factor in almost every context, and there is broad consensus that managers should be more competent and better equipped to prevent bullying, harassment, and unwanted sexual attention.

Many seafarers are pleased with new initiatives such as campaigns, policies, social events and other initiatives, while others are waiting to see the effects of them. Despite improvements in the work environment, and positive changes with respect to bullying and harassment over the past year, seafarers want more and better information as well as more training in the area.

**Research question 4:** With regard to dealing with reported or unreported bullying and harassment in the fleet, the informants and respondents state that some companies have established guidelines for reporting, while in other places there is a lack of knowledge about where or to whom incidents should be reported. Doubt, lack of courage, fear, and lack of support from senior officers are given as reasons for informants not reporting bullying and harassment. There is also a need for more and better information about complaints policies and processes. The informants want more uniformity across the fleet in how bullying, harassment and unwanted sexual attention are managed. There are reports of mixed experiences with case processing of complaints regarding unwanted sexual attention and, in some cases, there has been a tendency to blame the victim. The hierarchy onboard makes the complaints process more difficult.

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## 09 Annex

The annex comprises 8 interval tables for different questions from the BaHDIS questionnaire, under the headings 'work environment', 'bystanders' and 'bullying and harassment – support measures'. Tables have been attached without analysis at the request of the Danish Maritime Authority.

### Work Environment

1. How satisfied are you with your working conditions?

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very satisfied/Satisfied	2,737	81.1%
Partly satisfied	517	15.3%
Unsatisfied/very unsatisfied	123	3.7%

2. To what extent would you say that the workload is distributed fairly among the crew onboard?

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not at all/ to a small extent	512	15.9%
Somewhat	803	24.8%
To a large extent/ To a very large extent	1,922	59.4%

3. Have you experienced an improvement of the work environment onboard within the last 12 months?

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not at all/ To a small extent	1,016	32.0%
Somewhat	889	28.0%
To a large extent/ To a very large extent	1,266	39.9%

### Bystanders

4. Within the past 12 months, have you seen a colleague being bullied or harassed in your current workplace onboard?

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	472	16.5%
No	2,091	73.3%
Do not know	237	8.3%
Prefer not to answer	53	1.9%



## **Bullying and Harassment - support measures**

5. Are you aware of the existing support measures? - Have you received information from your company on how to report if either you or a colleague has experienced bullying or harassment?

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
To a large extent	1,723	61.8%
Somewhat	568	20.4%
To a small extent/Not at all	382	13.7%
I don't know	117	4.2%

6. Are you aware of the existing support measures? - Are you aware that you can complain to the Danish Maritime Authority?

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
To a large extent	1,260	45.2%
Somewhat	596	21.4%
To a small extent/Not at all	813	29.2%
I don't know	121	4.3%

7. Have you noticed that a change in relation to bullying and harassment has improved the work environment in the Danish Merchant Fleet?

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
To a large extent	766	27.4%
Somewhat	700	25.1%
To a small extent/Not at all	670	24.0%
I don't know	655	23.5%

8. Do you need any more information on bullying and harassment?

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	1,266	45.5%
No	1,318	47.3%
I don't know	219	7.9%





University of Southern  
Denmark  
Degnevej 14  
DK-6705 Esbjerg  
Denmark

Phone: +45 6550 1000  
[sdu@sdu.dk](mailto:sdu@sdu.dk)