

Looking After Our Minds Offshore

My name is Tyler Daniell, and I have been doing a project about how mental health affects offshore workers in energy

The bigger picture

- So, to start with the bigger picture, 19% of oil and gas workers suffer from psychological disorders, including anxiety and depression. I think this is quite significant because it shows that mental health isn't a small or isolated issue within the industry; there are a substantial number of workers who are potentially dealing with these problems.
- The next statistic is that one in six workers will experience at least one mental health issue per week. Again, this gives us an idea of how common these issues can be. And although we often talk about physical health and safety in offshore environments, mental health can sometimes receive less attention.
- Another issue is the lack of openness around mental health. If workers don't feel comfortable talking about how they're feeling, problems can potentially get worse before they seek support. This is particularly important in an industry where there can be a strong culture of just getting on with the job.



Life offshore



One of the biggest challenges of working offshore is the shift pattern. Workers can be doing long, rotating shifts, including nights, which can seriously disrupt their normal sleep pattern and circadian rhythm. When your body isn't getting a consistent sleep routine, this can have an impact on your mood and wellbeing. Over time, poor sleep and disrupted routines can contribute to things like anxiety, depression and burnout.



Our circadian rhythm is basically our body's internal clock. It helps regulate when we feel awake and when we feel tired. It's also linked to hormones such as melatonin and cortisol. So when we're constantly changing our sleep and wake times, we're working against that natural rhythm. That's one reason why offshore shift work is particularly demanding.



And then you've got the actual working pattern. Workers can typically spend around two weeks offshore doing 12-hour shifts, followed by two weeks back onshore. So although you get that time off afterwards, you're still spending a significant period working long hours and living away from your normal home environment.

Fatigue, performance and absence



Moving on to fatigue, performance, and workplace absence. Depression and anxiety aren't just personal struggles; they act as a massive cognitive tax, heavily burdening the brain's working memory and slowing down overall processing speed. In practise, this means that everyday decision-making becomes incredibly difficult, which directly hinders both social interactions and overall occupational functioning



Compounding this issue is the vicious cycle of fatigue. Fatigue risk severely degrades mental health by directly impairing the brain's ability to regulate emotions, process complex information, and cope with daily stress. When workers are exhausted, their psychological resilience plummets.



This brings us to a major issue in offshore environments: presenteeism, driven by what we call the 'grit culture'. Workers feel immense social and financial pressure. They will show up to demanding 12-hour shifts sick or completely exhausted because they refuse to let their crew down, or simply cannot afford to lose their shift pay.



To break this dangerous cycle, companies must implement organisational solutions; this means establishing paid sick leave and maintaining dedicated onshore relief crews to replace sick or fatigued workers.



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First, we must look at the physiological and emotional toll of isolation. Missing routine, everyday interactions with family and loved ones do more than cause homesickness. It actively elevates stress hormones within the body. This chronic biological stress serves as a primary driver for deep mental distress, drastically increasing an individual's risk of developing severe anxiety and depression.



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Compounding this isolation is a severe reluctance to get support. Many men deliberately delay seeking help for their mental health because they face intense professional anxiety. They legitimately fear losing their jobs, or they worry they will be formally deemed unfit for work by their employers. When you combine this fear with a high-pressure work environment, it becomes incredibly difficult for workers to step away, take a necessary break and focus on their psychological well-being.



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Finally, we have to address the cultural stigma. Admitting to mental health struggles in these industries is typically seen as a fundamental weakness. In most offshore environments, the culture actively glorifies toughness, dangerous risk-taking, and total emotional suppression. This toxic dynamic forces men to suffer in silence, sacrificing their health to fit into a broken cultural mold.

Isolation and men's mental health

The serious side

The statistics regarding offshore workers are deeply alarming. Research shows that offshore workers are a staggering 15 times more likely to die by suicide compared to onshore workers. Additionally, 40% of remote rotational shift workers report actively experiencing suicidal thoughts while they are on duty. These numbers represent a critical crisis happening miles away from standard healthcare infrastructure, where isolation acts as a major accelerator.

To address a crisis of this magnitude, we must implement immediate, actionable solutions on the ground. One of the most effective steps is to train first-level supervisors and team leads to act as 'Mental Health First Responders.' Because these leaders are on the frontlines every single day, proper training allows them to confidently check on a struggling colleague, notice subtle warning signs early, and step in before a situation escalates.

In addition to training supervisors, companies should actively enrol their crews in ASIST, which stands for Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training. This is a globally recognised, evidence-based program. It teaches workers exactly how to recognise when a crew member may be at immediate risk, and it provides the team with a clear, practical framework to intervene and keep that person safe until help arrives.

Creating a healthier workplace

- Now, let's look at how we can actively build a healthier workplace offshore. The solutions start with small, daily behaviours that bridge the gap created by isolation. For instance, simply encouraging crew members to call or message home regularly can significantly reduce the emotional strain of long-distance deployments.
- Second, we have to tackle the 'grit culture' directly. When crew members openly talk about stress rather than hiding it, it shifts the workplace dynamic. It normalises these struggles and creates a supportive network right there on the platform.
- The backbone of this shift is implementing Mental Health First Aid. Data shows that MHFA training is highly effective at boosting mental health literacy. It gives teams the practical skills and confidence needed to support one another, removes the shame often associated with mental health issues, and embeds well-being right alongside physical safety procedures. If we want a safer operation, we have to invest in a healthier workforce.



Some campaigns that help raise awareness of mental health include: Movember, which has backed more than 1250 health projects since 2003; it has raised over \$1.8 billion AUD globally for men's health. They funded over 1250 projects across 20 countries. Another campaign that has supported men's mental health is Time to Change; their main aim was to end mental health stigma and discrimination. They began in 2007 and ended in 2021 due to its funding expiring. By their conclusion, they had helped over 34 million people and were formally recognised by the Royal Society for Public Health.



Alongside campaigns has been the behaviour change theory, which has various different models which help diagnose why a behaviour happens and guide the design of effective interventions. Instead of guessing why a problem exists, professionals use the model to pinpoint exact barriers. It sits at the core of the broader behaviour change wheel, linking directly to nine intervention types. It is not 100% accurate, as no model can perfectly predict human actions. It finds the most likely reason a behaviour fails and guides you to the best intervention strategies driven by logistics.

Changing behaviour and communication

Technology standards & the future

- In the future of offshore energy and as technology advances, I believe that it will be very common for there to be many digital programmes and apps to help combat mental health. Even now, there are apps to help monitor stress levels, for example: WHOOP, which uses resting heart rate data in its app dashboard to score physiological stress and track trends over time; another app is Oura, which tracks daytime stress, cumulative stress, and stress resilience using smart ring data.
- Digital programmes and cloud analytics in upstream operations can cut overall costs by up to %15 and boost efficiency up to 20%. Real-time monitoring and A2 simulations prevent equipment failures, dropping unexpected shutdowns by up to 30%. Handheld mobile devices and tracking tags optimise material delivery across complex environments
- In oil, gas and wind, they are very masculine and have a stoicism culture. This leads to workers feeling weak and vulnerable if they have mental health problems. This is because it isn't talked about enough, so they assume everyone is fine and think they themselves are weak. Some ways they can help fix this is by talking and being open and honest about their stresses; this could start with leaders sharing some stories about people who didn't and what happened to them.

What can we do?

- We as people can make it more acceptable in society for others to talk about their feelings so that other people won't be afraid to and bottle up their feelings. We can also stop calling people weak for speaking up because it is actually very strong to speak up about how you feel. Also, we should encourage healthy lifestyles like having a regular sleep routine and going for a 10- 20 minute walk to help reduce stress and anxiety.