

Incidence of illnesses and injuries at sea

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Research objective

The purpose of this study is to find the incidence of illness and injury on board non dinghy sailing vessels, as well as to evaluate medical preparedness, with focus on medical kits and manuals.

Introduction

Sailing is a popular and iconic activity all over the world. However there is surprisingly scarce information on the injuries and illnesses that sailors experience. This is even more true of recreational yacht sailing. Most of the information on illness and injury among sailors is confined to the more elite competitive aspects of the sport, such as the olympics or the America's Cup, as well to dinghy sailors who usually always sail with rescue and support personnel on hand [1–4]. Both these groups are subjected to a high degree of risk and are not representative of recreational yacht sailors. The most research that comes closest to surveying illness and injury in recreational keelboat sailors is from a questionnaire conducted by Andrew T. Nathanson 2010 [5]. However, focus is mainly on injuries as opposed to illnesses and also includes episodes reported from dinghies. A better picture of illness and injury would better facilitate medical preparedness especially with regard to equipping sailors with an evidence based medical kit and manual.

Methods

The preliminary stage of the research consisted of a literature review on the incidence of injuries and illnesses reported on board recreational/amateur cruising vessels. Since the literature on this topic is sparse, data from a wider category of cruisers that included professional racing were included. The findings from this review served as the basis for the formulation of a survey and interview questions.

In order to avoid possible bias that might arise with a exclusively quantitative or qualitative approach, a mixed method questionnaire is being used. Further reasons for a mixed method questionnaire included:

1. Exploration of the problem: Given the scarcity of research on this matter, this research is primarily intended to obtain an understanding of the scope of medical emergencies at sea and thereby might provide the basis of potential quantitative follow-up research.
2. Reduce limitations of quantitative research.
3. Avoid unreported minor conditions: A quantitative section covers the most commonly occurring injuries and illnesses. Additional illnesses and injuries can be reported in a separate qualitative section, so an accurate and extensive overview of medical emergencies on sailing vessels can be obtained. The limitations of a solely quantitative approach are thereby avoided.
4. Identify current treatment: Of particular interest are also the treatment strategies of commonly occurring injuries and illnesses. In order to cover common approaches and feasible treatment methods, are the participants asked to further specify the nature of their complaints as well as the treatment.

The survey was initially sent out to a panel that comprised of veteran sailors without a medical background, sailors with a medical background, and a manufacturer of marine medical kits. Based on the feedback received the survey was accordingly adjusted and has at the time of this writing been sent out to a much wider group of participants. The participants are free to give personal details (not mandatory) and the answers are being inserted in a safe database on a dedicated hard drive.

Sailors were approached through social media networks such as reddit.com and facebook groups, as well as other sailing-related blogs and magazines. The survey was made available from mid February 2018 and is going to be available for submissions until end of May. Data processing through SPSS will take place from the end of April, however the survey will remain available for sailors to fill in. As of yet, the two primary groups of participants are followers of sailing facebook groups and readers of sailing magazines. There have also sizable responses from sailing bloggers and other sailing forums on which a link to the survey was made available.

Outcome:

We are expecting a comprehensive overview of the most common illnesses and injuries amongst recreational yacht sailors. In addition, we are intending to verify the findings from the literature and confirm if they are true for the larger population of recreational yacht sailors.

We are particularly looking for the following aspects of medical emergencies on sailing yachts:

1. What are the most common injuries and illnesses on sailing vessels?
2. What medical equipment do sailors have available?
3. What is the level of medical training and related expertise amongst sailors?
4. To what extent do sailors feel prepared for a medical emergency on board?
5. To what extent does current medical equipment cover commonly occurring emergencies?
6. How should a medical kit be designed, in order to manage the most common injuries and illnesses?

The researchers:

We are a group of three medical students at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, the Netherlands. This research has been undertaken as part of our bachelor thesis. The matter of illnesses and injuries at sea seemed suitable, since little research has been performed in this area and we believe that we would be providing valuable information to the global community of sailors. The researchers have no conflicting affiliations.

What we would like from you?

Whether you go out on the water for the day or you have completed the World ARC, we'd love to hear your stories. [Take the survey](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfNvB_PV6C-GL_rByplRelaWY-Athr7zREmWg17b6qyLi2g6A/viewform?usp=sf_link). It takes 15 minutes to fill.

(link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfNvB_PV6C-GL_rByplRelaWY-Athr7zREmWg17b6qyLi2g6A/viewform?usp=sf_link)

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