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AIR RAGE: VIOLENCE TOWARD CABIN CREW (A STUDY ON VICTIMIZATION OF UNRULY PASSENGERS IN TURKEY)*

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ABSTRACT

As a subset of workplace violence, air rage is an external threat in the aviation industry, which is used to describe aggressive and disruptive behavior by unruly passengers during flight. Little is known about the air rage phenomenon as there has been surprisingly little empirical research, and limited statistical data. The purpose of this paper is to present the main findings on air rage from a study among cabin crew members, which was conducted in 2010 in Istanbul, Turkey. In brief, the results have suggested that most respondents viewed unruly passenger behavior as a component of their jobs. The findings have described that educated male passengers were likely to engage in air rage. The psychological well-being not only of the victims, but also of the witnesses, was lower than that of the cabin crew members who did not exposed to air rage.

Keywords: *air rage, unruly passengers, passenger violence, cabin crew, Turkey*

1. INTRODUCTION

The nature and dynamics of workplace violence in many areas and contexts have been a frequent subject of study in the last two decades. As a subset of workplace violence, air rage is an external threat in the aviation industry, which is used to describe aggressive and disruptive behavior by unruly passengers during flight (Anglin et al. 2009).

Little is known about the air rage phenomenon as there has been surprisingly little empirical research and limited statistical data. However, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) reported that air rage has been a growing problem in worldwide. It poses a potential threat to safety and security of nearly 2.5 billion air passengers each year (Hunter 2006).

According to IATA statistics, there has been a more than six-fold increase in air rage cases in 2009 compared to 2007, including the data of 102 airlines (The Daily Beast 2010). In US, for the years 1995–2010, there were 3262 unruly passenger cases, with the average being 204 per year (FAA 2011). In UK, a total number of 3.529 significant incidents were reported to the Civil Aviation Authority (the UK CAA) during the year ending March 31, 2009, up from 28.9 percent a year earlier (Young 2010). In Australia, the frequency of aggressive behaviors by air passengers rose from 64 in 2007 to 461 in 2009 (Creedy 2010). According to a survey by the Scheduled Airline Association of Japan (SAAJ), the frequency of reported of disruptive passenger behavior increased 5.4 times between 1997 and 2000 (World Airline News 2001).

Passenger rage encompasses wide range of offensive behaviors. The form of the most frequent violence reported is verbal aggression including verbal intimidation, insulting, slandering, or verbally attacking. In UK, 37% of reported incidents involved verbal abuse (DfT 2009). In his study, Rolfe found that verbal abuse to cabin crew or other passengers occurred in 43% of all air rage cases (Rolfe 2000).

The second category is physical abuse involving any deliberate behavior resulting in injury. In UK, 44 of 3.529 complaints on abusive passengers were serious cases covering physical injury to airplane staff (Young 2010). In a study based on 29 air rage cases in the Canadian Press for the time period 1998-2000, the authors found that in 19 of 29 incidents, passenger became angry and attacked one or more airline staff (Smart and Mann 2003).

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Finally, sexual harassment is another type of air rage including any form of unwanted verbal, physical or psychological remarks of a sexual nature. IATA records for years 1994-1998 showed that about 1% of air rage cases were related to sexual abuse (Rolfe 2000).

Both environmental factors and characteristics of the unruly passengers are assumed to contribute to the occurrence of air rage. Main reason is alcohol and smoking that are estimated to be responsible for over 50% of all violence. According to the CAA statistics, 59 percent of unruly behavior on the board were related to alcohol and smoking (DfT 2009). Smart and Mann concluded that excessive alcohol use was the leading factor in nearly 52 percent of the incidents (Smart and Mann 2003).

Secondly, there are some external causes that may increase the risk of passenger violence, such as delayed flights and slack airline service (Cronian 2006). In her study, Hunter points out a correlation between the passenger's perception of service quality and abusive acts (Hunter 2006).

Lastly, the psycho-physiological effect of flying on the human body and mind is another likely reason for offensive behavior on the board (Andre 2011). Especially cramped seats, and close quarters may heighten passenger sensitivities and anxiety which in turn may even lead to unruly behaviors (Baranishyn, Cudmore and Fletcher 2010). A study by London Guildhall University found the effect of cramped conditions in the aircraft cabin on air rage (Giesecke 2001).

It is difficult to identify the profile of potential unruly passengers, and characterization has often been based on information derived from the analysis of the incidents reported. Although, in some instances, cabin staff are victimized by both male and female passengers in all age groups, in the most cases the unruly passengers are mainly young male passengers (for ages 20-35 years old) (Barron 2002). The data of the CAA present that male offenders were responsible for 73% of air rage incidents, and the most common age group was 30 to 39 years old (DfT 2009). Similarly, Smart and Mann found that in 27 of 29 cases, males were given for perpetrators with an average age of 35.6 (Smart and Mann 2003).

Some authors emphasize on the role of group interaction in air rage cases. Especially, travelling together for leisure purposes has the potential to be more boisterous and aggressive actions (Morgan and Denis 2002). According to the CAA reports, 53% of the disruptive passengers were travelling in a group, 33% in a family, 13% alone, and 1% as a deportee (DfT 2009). Considering the income profile, business class passengers seem to be just as likely to cause trouble as those travelling in economy (Barron 2002).

Occupation violence leads to physical and psychological consequences on the victims (Barling et al. 2009). Especially, it has been shown to be correlated with stress and psychological well-being (Vartia-Vaananen 2003), of which the effects may take much longer than physical results. However, the existing data on unruly passengers concern only physical assaults. According to the figures, some physical aggression has been common in air rage but serious injuries have been infrequent (WHO 2011). Indeed, an incident including physical injury to staff is only witnessed in one in every 24.000 flights (Young 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to present the main findings on air rage from a study among cabin crew, which was conducted in 2010 in Istanbul, Turkey. With this purpose, the present study intends to analyze four main points: (1) to increase knowledge of the air rage phenomenon, (2) to determine the role of some demographic factors in becoming a victim and in facing and experiencing air rage, (3) to analysis personal characteristics of potential unruly passengers, and (4) to increase understanding of psychological effects of abusive acts on the victims.

This paper is divided into four sections. Following the introductory section providing a brief conceptual framework of air rage, the second section gives an overview description of the methodology, including methods for data collection and analysis. The results and discussions are presented in section 3. The final section summarizes conclusions.

2. METHOD

2.1. Sample

A total of 187 full-time cabin crew staff (i.e., hosts and hostesses) from an airline company in Turkey participated in this study on a voluntary basis. The sample consisted of 53 males (28.4%) and 134 females (71.6%), with 5-year age categories (i.e., below 25 years, 25-34, 35-43, etc). More than half of the respondents (58.7%) were single, 35.8% were married, and the rest were divorced. Their hosting experience ranged from 0.5 to 10 years.

2.2. Study Design

A self-report questionnaire consisting of 25 questions was used in the data collection. In the study, the forms of air rage were measured using a revised version of the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization (LIPT), including 9 negative acts. The questionnaires were completed by the respondents in confidence. To ensure anonymity, the participants were asked to not write their names on the questionnaire.

The reliability of the data was tested by Cronbach's alpha. It presented a value of 0.71 that was greater than the recommended value of .70.

The data were analyzed using SPSS software. The results of the statistical analysis were presented in the form of frequencies, cross-tabulations, chi-square test and Kruskal-Wallis. The frequencies were used to describe the prevalence and nature of air rage. Differences between men and women, and between marital status groups, were tested using chi-square test. Differences between victims, witnesses and unexposed in reported stress symptoms were studied using Kruskal-Wallis.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Victimization and Reported Air Rage

Table 1 summarizes the occurrence of air rage in the sample population according to gender and marital status. The prevalence of air rage was very high among the group (71.6%). Gender differences in facing air rage seemed to be small. Female cabin crew (72.9%) felt subjected to passenger aggression more often than their male counterparts (68.4%). However, the results of the chi-square test indicated no statistically significant sex differences in the perception of being abused by unruly passengers.

TABLE 1: FORMS OF AIR RAGE BY GENDER AND MARITAL STATUS

N=187	Frequencies (%)	Sex (%)		Marital Status (%)		
		Male	Female	Single	Married	Divorced
Victims	71.6	68.4	72.9	75.4	66.7	63.6
Witnesses	85.0	82.5	86.1	82.2	88.9	90.9
Scolding	60.2	58.5	67.2	63.6	65.2	72.7
Humiliation	48.8	50.9	53.0	56.1	52.2	18.2
Exaggerated criticism	42.8	37.7	49.3	46.7	43.5	54.5
Insulting expressions	35.8	43.4	36.6	41.1	36.2	27.3
Swearing	24.9	34.0	23.1	27.1	29.0	9.1
Ridicule	24.4	26.4	26.9	27.1	24.6	27.3
Unwanted sexual proposals	19.4	17.0	22.4	25.2	17.4	0*
Threat of physical violence	6.5	9.4	6.0	7.5	5.8	9.1
Physical violence	6.0	5.7	6.7	7.5	4.3	9.1
*p > .05						

On the other hand, no consistent results were obtained regarding the connections between marital status and being victimized. Air rage was widespread in every marital status category.
The number of respondents witnessing air rage incidents was also very high rate in the sample (85.1%). It was more common in women than in men, and over 90% of the singles reported such observations.

3.2. Forms of Air Rage

Table 1 also presents the forms of air rage. The highest frequency items were verbally aggressive actions (such as scolding, humiliation, insulting etc.), followed by unwanted sexual proposals, threat of physical violence, and physical attacks, which were similar to what has been observed in the air rage cases reported by IATA and the UK CAA.

According to the results, while almost two-third of the respondents got scolding from passengers, about half experienced public humiliation. A few differences between men and women, and between the marital status groups, were found. The women were subjected to scolding, and humiliation, as well as to exaggerated criticism more often than the men. The single victims reported unwanted sexual proposals significantly more often (25.2%) than their married counterparts (17.4%).

3.3. Unruly Passengers

The results in Table 2 pertain to identifying the passengers who are most likely to engage in air rage based on the opinions of victims. Male (34 percent) and educated (44 percent) passengers tended to be far more frequently reported as perpetrators by the victims, which is in agreement with the results of other studies (Rolfe 2000, Smart and Mann 2003) as well as the data of CAA (DfT 2009).

TABLE 2: UNRULY PASSENGERS (N=187)

Gender Profile (%)			Education Profile (%)		
Victims / Offenders	Male	Female	Victims / Offenders	Male	Female
Mostly male (80% and up)	17.9	12.4	Mostly uneducated or less educated	7.7	8.6
Primarily male (60%-70%)	28.2	17.1	Mostly educated (high school)	48.7	41.9
Primarily female (60%-70%)	10.3	19.0	Mostly highly educated (university)	10.3	15.2
Mostly female (80% and up)	7.7	4.8	All educational groups about equally	33.3	34.3
Both genders about equally	35.9	46.7			

Considering the gender profile, male passengers were most frequently reported by the male victims (46.1%) as the offenders while nearly half of all female victims (46.7%) stated that male and female passengers were about equally often to display unruly behavior. The both genders thought that educated passengers were much more likely to abuse cabin crew.

3.4. Potential Psychological Impact of Air Rage on Victims

Passenger abuse has some emotional impact on the victims including sleeplessness, depression, anger, anxiety, and loss of humor.

In the present study, air rage was regarded as an important occupational risk of the whole cabin crew. The level of negative consequences was therefore compared between the victims, the witnesses and the non-victim group. Table 3 presents the outcomes on reported some emotional feelings including sleep changes, fatigue, social anxiety, and low mood in the three groups.

As Table 3 points out, the respondents exposed to passenger violence reported most of all psychological reactions more often than the witnesses and the unexposed group did. The victims particularly differed from the non-victims in the perception of fatigue, aggressiveness, social anxiety and low self-confidence.

The witnesses were also affected by air rage. They differed from the non-victims in overall feelings of fatigue, aggressiveness and social anxiety but did not differ in the complaining of sleeplessness, self-confidence or mood.

TABLE 3: CONSEQUENCES OF AIR RAGE

N=187	Among Victims (%)	Among Non-victims (%)	Among Witnesses (%)
Sleeplessness	55.6	50.9	53.8
Fatigue	51.1*	33.3*	49.1
Aggressiveness	41.0*	24.6*	38.6
Social anxiety	31.3*	10.5*	27.5
Work alienation	20.3	15.8	21.1
Low mood	13.9	10.5	12.9
Feelings of low self-confidence	12.5*	8.8*	12.3
*p > .05			

The effect of gender on the outcomes of abusive behaviors by passengers was also assessed. The results illustrated that gender was an explanatory factor in analyzing the differences of the symptoms. The male respondents, whether victims, witnesses or non-victims, reported more sleeplessness and feelings of low self-confidence than the female participants.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The present study has examined a number of aspects relating to a growing phenomenon known as air rage among the cabin crew members. One of the most obvious conclusions drawn from the findings is that most respondents viewed unruly passenger behavior as a component of their jobs. Secondly, verbal abuse was found to be a significant predictor of passenger-related victimization.

Moreover, the results have described that educated male passengers were likely to engage in air rage. Finally, the psychological well-being not only of the victims, but also of the witnesses, was lower than that of the cabin crew members who did not exposed to air rage. Future research should use more sophisticated methods to identify specific risk parameters and to describe the causes of aggression and violence toward airline staff.

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