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Fear of Flying; The Role of Cabin Crew

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Abstract

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This research intends to point out current methods, viewpoints, and best practices of cabin crew with passengers suffering from fear of flying. As current research literature is quite limited regarding crew correlation to fear of flying, the main research problem was created.

The study starts with an introduction to the fear of flying and briefly covers the aviation industry's history, current state, and forecasts. As air travel keeps expanding yearly, so does the number of fearful passengers. For airlines to better understand and thus serve this niche market, best practices together with development ideas are needed.

The theory part will look into fear of flying as a phenomenon and tends to cover aspects such as creation, forms of alleviating attributes, and lastly, what is the current contribution of airlines for helping in fear of flying.

In the results section, current working methods together with best practices determined by the questionnaire respondents are presented. Based on these findings, suggestions for cabin crew training development and future research are demonstrated.

The last part of this research will focus on discussion based on the overview of the report and own learning is evaluated by the author.

The research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, however, the pandemic impacts or effects have not been included as a part of this research.

Keywords
Fear of flying, aviation, safety, cabin crew

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1 Introduction

Every day millions of people fly across the globe, either for a relaxing holiday, visiting family and friends, or simply for business. Thus, the aviation industry inspires us to experience new cultures, connects us with our loved ones, and makes business opportunities closer than ever. Aviation has hereby changed the way modern people live their lives.

Decades ago, air travel was more of a luxurious form of travel rather than an everyday commodity as it is today. The oil embargo in 1973 together with the introduction of wide-body aircraft led to excess capacity with high fuel costs, which ultimately triggered the deregulation of the industry (IATA 2020). In the past thirty years, the aviation industry has seen a tremendous change with new technological innovations, the rise of Low-Cost Carriers (LCC), and their gained market share from the Full-Service Carriers (FSC). Today, more than 4.1 billion people and 56 million tons of cargo are transported with over 37 million flights (ICAO 2020).

A current Covid-19 pandemic is an event the industry has never seen before. However, this thesis will not consider the Covid-19 pandemic, but rather focus on the future after the pandemic. For the industry, the future seems bright as aviation transport keeps expanding. Before 2030, approximately 200 000 flights will take off and land daily (ICAO 2020). With growing passenger numbers rises the number of people that are afraid to fly.

Even it is a widely accepted fact, that air travel is the safest form of travel, airline passenger perceptions are triggering their choices on whether to fly as a form of travel. As air travel keeps expanding, these people will form a group of passengers who refuse to board an airplane, and thus affect airline revenue.

This research aims to identify the key measures that cabin crew members take to provide alleviation for passengers suffering from the Fear of Flying (FoF). It is both necessary and inevitable to take this matter into account when considering the future of aviation and, especially on-board service. Current research seems limited regarding cabin crew relation to fear of flying and came thus the main research problem of this study.

The objective of this research was to determine what is solely the role of cabin crew when it comes to fear of flying and how effective do members of the cabin crew see their role as the alleviator. Currently, very little seems to be known about cabin crew relation to this aforementioned fear, as especially peer-reviewed literature seems quite inexistent.

Cabin crew plays a significant role when it comes to passenger flight experience, which is why the correlation between cabin crew members and passengers suffering from fear of flying should not be overlooked.

The results section will point out the perspective of cabin crew members and their opinions and views of the current situation of FoF. Based on cabin crews´ view and perspective, suggestions are given on how to better confront fearful passengers and alleviate their possible anxiety during a flight to minimize any risk of an extreme situation evolving.

Based on the findings of the results, suggestions are given for airlines on how to develop training in a manner that best serves both fearful passengers and airlines themselves.

2 Research Problem

The specific problem is that there seems to be no current research on how the cabin crew relates to the fear of flying. This study aims to determine the methods which members of the cabin crew use to alleviate passengers' fear of flying. In addition, this paper will point out the most effective methods according to crew members.

Very little is known of how crew members relate to the fear of flying. The focus of this study is primarily on experiences, viewpoints, and best practices of crew members, who have all worked for the industry for years. Both current methods and ideas for future development are covered.

Whereas air travel keeps expanding steadily every year, it can be assumed, that fear of flying levels increases as a parallel phenomenon (Fleicher et. al., 2012).
With this in mind, all stakeholders, especially airlines need to focus on this matter to better serve their passengers and to be able to provide services for this niche but growing market in question.

Since the competition tends to be fierce between airlines competing from passengers, best practices and thus better service for fearful passengers might become leverage for airlines in the future.

3 Theoretical framework

Many people are afraid to fly, yet millions of people fly every day. It is quite common to be afraid to fly or to suffer from fear of flying. Other people express their fears clearly, while others tend to keep it to themselves, either way, as air travel keeps expanding, so does the number of fearful people.

According to Foreman and Van Gerwen (2008), in the developed countries approximately 35 of every 100 people have been afraid to fly at some point of their life, and internationally, 10 to 40 percent of people are or have been afraid while traveling by air (Saadat et. al., 2014). The aforementioned is then dealt mostly with simply by avoiding flying. There are three stages of how the attitude towards reluctance is shown; completely avoid flying, to fly only if in a compelling situation, or will fly if a situation requires but is very anxious about the event (Saadat et. al., 2014, Fleicher et. al., 2012).

These percentages may indicate future opportunities lost for airlines; thus, it underlines the importance of the issue at hand and must be further studied.

As current literature seems to neglect the cabin crew relation in any perspective towards fear of flying, a research problem was formed. Passengers encounter several different airline and airport personnel during their customer journey, however, as cabin crew are the only ones in contact with fearful passengers during a flight, they came thus the main target group to gather insights from.

3.1 Fear of Flying

The first literature regarding the psychology of fear of flying was found right after World War One and is mainly focused on military aircrew´s psychoanalytical techniques (Oakes & Bor, 2010).

Fear of flying is usually a symptom of other more severe psychological disorders, such as panic or anxiety disorder, and can emerge over time. Characteristics together with the unique background are affecting the emergence of fear of flying, however, it may also be a symptom of a psychological disorder called General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) (Bor & Oakes, 2010).

For young children, traveling an airplane can be adventurous and exciting, till the age of six, when fear might start to develop (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008). Fear of flying usually develops over time. It may be a result of a holiday gone wrong, the experience of severe turbulence on-air, fearful parent or travel companion, emergency of another passenger, or any other similar situation, that might have a triggering effect (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008, Bor & Oakes, 2010).
The circumstances that ultimately work as a trigger may have nothing to do with flying but can be associated with the situation negatively, as people tend to be sensitive and prone to psychological changes (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008).

For those who suffer from this fear, the most typical list of worrying thoughts passing one´s mind, are suffocating, trapped in a closed space, being separated from the closest caretaker, heart attack or ´going mad´ and ultimately, dying (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008).

3.2 Type of fears

As fears may develop over time, so does the type one suffers. Fear of flying can be categorized into two different types, internal and external catastrophes. Internal catastrophe being the loss of one´s control and unable to “get it together”, while external catastrophe stands for loss of control of the airplane (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008). In both cases, these fears contain hights, turbulence, emergency or crashing, unpleasant weather, take-off and landing, and lastly, the situation itself, where the passenger feels trapped inside, unable to affect the possible outcome. A common factor in both variations seems to be the loss of control (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008).

The third and rarer group is the one where passenger suffers from both fears mentioned above, external, and internal catastrophes, or ultimate loss of control (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008).

3.3 Treatment

Different methods are used to improve or even abolish fear of flying, still, cognitive approaches will usually result in increased flying activity among fearful passengers and thus reduce anxiety related to flying (Oakes & Bor, 2010).

These techniques usually consist of literature, procedures and safety explained in depth. The training will need to take place in a safe environment with a stress-free atmosphere, to ensure stability among participants (Oakes & Bor, 2010).

In group training sessions, relaxation is a component of treatments, but as a stand-alone treatment, it has shown to be the most effective method, as it progressively reduces anxiety. The high success rates this form of treatment produces are most likely a result of highly motivated participants that are keen on overcoming their fear of flying, and charismatic staff together with a supportive atmosphere (Oakes & Bor, 2010).

3.3.1 Self-help as a form of treatment

Self-help as a way of treatment usually consists of several relaxation techniques such as breathing techniques, imagination exercises, and reducing muscle tension. This should eventually lead to rehearsed flying experience (Oakes & Bor, 2010).

Like many treatments, self-help as a form of treatment is not necessarily sufficient if applied as an only form of treatment, thus aforementioned techniques together with help of a professional may lead to better and longer-lasting results (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008; Oakes & Bor, 2010).

As airlines have noticed their possible revenue loss within passengers who may choose alternative methods of transport, have they applied methods of their own to help fearful passengers overcome their obstacles.

3.3.2 Airlines response to the fear of flying

Several airlines have taken their initiative to help passengers overcome the fear of flying. Virgin Atlantic, as an example, has had their ´Flying Without Fear´ courses from 1997 and claim to have helped 2000-3000 passengers yearly to overcome their fears (Virgin Atlantic, 2021).

Picture 1. Virgin Atlantic promotion picture (2021).

This course aims to work towards the goal of passengers getting back the control of the situation, statistics regarding aviation safety, and psychological tools. By the end of the course, the participants are taken onto a narrated flight, where the whole voyage is explained thoroughly (Virgin Atlantic, 2021). The aim of this is to provide explanatory insights of a flight step by step, as a fearful passenger would want on a regular flight to enhance secure feeling.

3.3.3 Airports contribute to FoF

As well as airlines have airport operators have taken an approach to alleviate passengers' fears regarding flying (Finavia, 2021; Swedavia 2021). On Finavias webpage, an explanatory article has been published to passengers who may seek guidance from the airport operator (Finavia, 2021).

The publication seems quite concise; however, it seems quite a several aviation stakeholders have taken an initiative of some kind to participate in this growing phenomenon of FoF.

Gatwick airport website provides several different options for passengers to choose the most suitable fear of flying alleviating attributes from, such as hypnotherapy location search, easyJet's Fearless Flying course, and Fly and be Calm app to mention a few (Gatwick Airport 2021).

Picture 2. Fly and be Calm application promotion picture (2021).

The application is based on quick psychological principles on recordings, so that the fear could be conquered fast and without having to spend lots of money (Orpheus Mind Technologies 2021).

3.4 Fear of Flying Effects on Passenger Decision Making

According to Fleischer et al., (2012) fear of flying can influence passenger's choice of itinerary and those who suffer severe FoF may choose a legacy carrier over a Low-cost Carrier due to their perception of safety and trust. Most attributes affecting decision making are price, comfortability, schedule, and service, which are considered reassuring, even these are not primarily related to safety (Fleischer et al., 2012).

4 Aviation safety

For airlines to attract and retain passengers, the public image together with a perceived feeling of safety may affect passengers when choosing an airline (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008).

The aviation industry is widely known for its safety development and various programs in which the industry is monitored and audited for compliance with regulation and is the most controlled industry when it comes to safety (Oster et. al., 2013). Despite the statistics and safety records of airlines, people who are afraid to fly, the statistics alone will not relieve fear or anxiety, as fearful passengers feel their lives are threatened (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008).

In the United States and Europe 99.99% of airline passengers get to their destination safely (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008). Unfortunately, in the developing countries, aviation safety is not on the same level with Western Europe or North America, and this is due to older and less maintained equipment, limited regulatory enforcement, poor infrastructure, and limitations in crew and on-ground personnel (Oster et. al., 2013)

Human factors have been acknowledged to be the key element when it comes to aviation safety in general (Oster et. al., 2013) whilst cabin and flight crew´s professionalism is found to be the most important factor of cabin safety (Chang & Yang, 2011). The industry safety authorities developed a crew resource management training requirement ensuring crews make the best use of all resources available to safely manage a flight (Airbus 2015). Safety enhancements keep being developed over the years, more recently satellite-based navigation allowed to further increase precision. Air transport is a complex system that relies on a variety of aspects interacting with one and other (Airbus 2015).

According to the International Aviation Transport Association (IATA) (2018), real threats for aviation are cyber-attacks and serious pandemics, like the one the world is currently facing. These threats should be taken into consideration mostly within the industry professionals and personnel accountable for airline future forecasting, rather than individual passengers weighing their reasons to refrain from flying.

4.1 IATA Operational Safety Audit

The IATA Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) is a safety program for airlines, which main target is to assess operational management and control systems. With IOSA audits, the program ensures high safety standards and regulatory compliance. All IATA member airlines must remain registered to maintain their membership (IATA 2021).

IOSA was established is to ensure all IATA member airlines follow up-to-date regulatory compliance and as an IATA member, an airline can guarantee high operational safety for their passengers.

4.2 Aviation safety development

A lot has changed over the years, especially after September 11th, 2001. Significant improvements have taken place since then, and safety has improved tremendously, given the enormous growth of the industry (Oster et. al., 2013). Continuous effort to evolve has led to these improvements in safety. This includes all stakeholders of the industry, such as airlines, aircraft- and engine manufacturers to different policymakers. Technology and automation similarly play a role in most recent developments when it comes to safety improvements (Oster et. al., 2013).

Safety Management Systems or SMS is an initiative of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) which is *"an organized approach to managing safety, including the necessary organizational structures, accountabilities, policies, and procedures"* according to ICAO (2020). It attempts to monitor and identify risks and safety hazards as well as to set standards for international aviation, where the main idea is to proactively improve the safe environment for the industry stakeholders (Oster et. al., 2013).

In 2019 alone, more than half of the world's population, 4,54 billion passengers flew safely on 4,68 million flights (IATA 2021). 53 accidents took place in 2019 with 270 fatalities, this is 0,000006% or one in every 16,8 million passengers which decreased by half compared to 2018 (IATA 2021).

4.3 Reasons for Aviation accidents and incidents

Despite the safety records of airlines, accidents and incidents have occurred in the past and will most likely happen again in the future. When an accident occurs, it is most likely

to happen during the final approach and landing, as it accounts for 3 and 1 percent of the total flight time, but it accounts for 16 and 20 percent of fatal accidents respectively (Oster et. al., 2013).

Figure 1. Fatal accidents and exposure by phase of flight 2002-2011 (Oster et. al., 2013).

Phase of flight	Percent of	
	Exposure	Fatal accidents
Taxi, load, unload, parked, tow	0	11
Takeoff	1	10
Initial climb	1	5
Climb (flaps up)	14	5
Cruise	57	11
Descent	11	4
Initial approach	12	14
Final approach	3	16
Landing	1	20

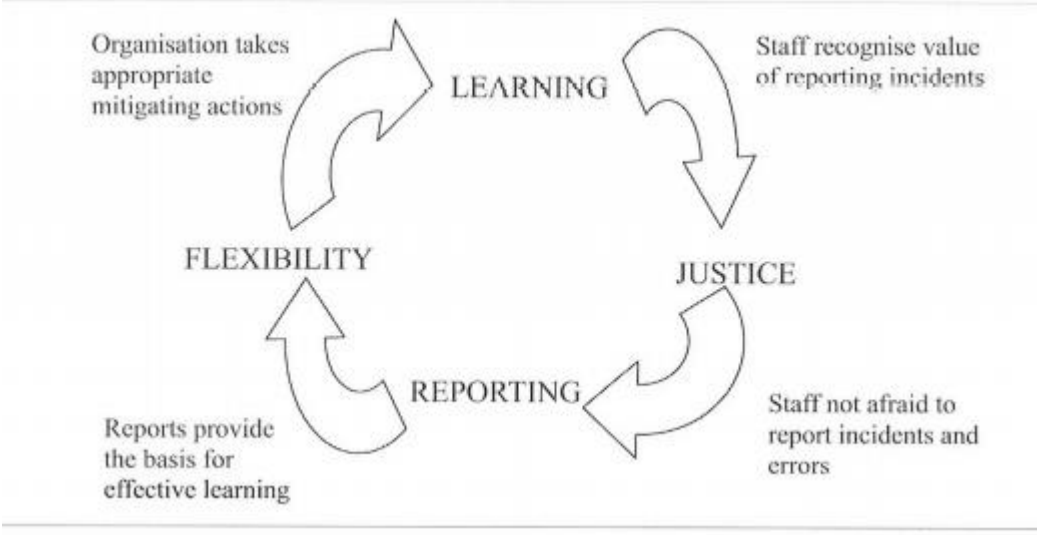
Exposure is the percentage of flight time estimated for a 1.5 h flight.

Cruising, or when airborne, which is acknowledged to be the least risky phase of a flight, accounts for 57 percent of the total flight time, and in such time only 11 percent of fatal accidents occur (Oster et. al., 2013).

Accidents are rarely caused by a single event, but rather a sequence of events, where usually a human factor plays a significant role when it comes to the outcome of the event (Oster et. al., 2013, Rose 2004).

Rose (2004) suggests, that as air crashes have reduced significantly over the years, the industry stakeholders are “forgetting to be afraid”, and thus the risk related to accidents could be minimized in the organizations´ mind.

Figure 2. Learning from incidents (Rose, A. 2004).



While accident rates are degrading, the opportunity to learn from them declines as well, this, however, should lead to airlines´ willingness to accept that incidents are “free lessons” for airlines to learn from, as they are inevitable (Rose, A. 2004).
As Rose (2004) suggests, a cultural shift is needed within organizations to better learn and accept that change can only come through understanding and learning from these incidents, where blaming and lack of openness is reducing this opportunity.

If this cultural change is accepted within an organization, as employees across the company are promoted to report any situations that may lead to an error, a safe environment is created where staff is willing to speak up and thus, an incident occurs is reduced (Rose, A. 2004).

4.4 Airline Safety Reporting

A debate is ongoing on whether to publish safety information and records of airlines. Different authorities discussing its relevance and benefits to the industry stakeholders have had split opinions (Fleischer et al., 2015). If this information was to publish, it may not only be in an inaccurate form where it may cause negative perceptions but even interpreted falsely, when passengers suffering from FoF might ultimately choose another form of travel over flying (Fleischer et al., 2015).

Websites offering different data and information regarding airline safety do exist, however, the information provided is usually inconsistent and is impossible to fully acknowledge (Fleischer et al., 2015).

With airline safety records and all information related, Rose (2004) suggests, that being able to collectively learn from previous events, the industry needs to identify that incidents are precursors to later fatal accidents.

4.5 Role of media

Since airlines who enjoy a high safety image in the eyes of the public are more likely to gain in passenger numbers, the unfortunate airlines involved in high media coverage disasters as below will have a negative impact on the airlines' passenger numbers and public perception of the safety of air travel.

The period between 2014 and 2015 was very unfortunate for the industry, as several major accidents occurred, including the Germanwings A320 crash; the disappearance of MH370, the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines MH17; the Air Algerie AH5017, and TransAsia GE222 crashes. These events can heavily impact public image regarding the safety of a certain region or airline (Koo et. al., 2018).

Picture 3. Malaysian Airlines MH17 wreckage (BBC 2019).

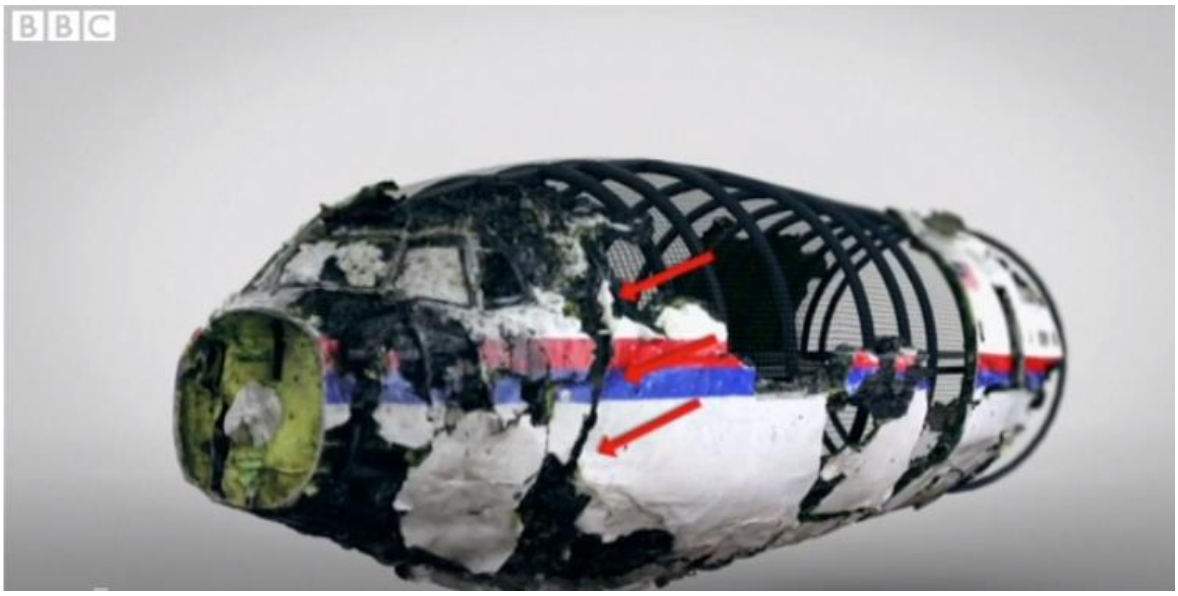
Aviation accidents may seem to be growing in the eyes of the public due to strong media coverage, which all aviation-related accidents and incidents tend to have, henceforth the

role of media is a heavy influencer when shaping perceptions of the public. These rare cases not only shape the illusion of danger in aviation but also increase the fear of flying (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008).

Picture 4. Animated picture of shooting down the Malesian Airlines MH17 (BBC 2019).

Quite understandably, such images, as shown above, may easily lead to conclusions of air travelers about the safety of air travel which may increase the fear of flying.

Picture 5. An animated reconstruction of the MH17 (BBC 2019).



Despite the seldom occurrence of such events, these major disasters with strong media coverage may not fade away from people’s minds.

All images presented above, do not serve any airline positively, but rather increase the number of fearful passengers. Images like these can quite easily swipe the ratio of 99,99% passengers arriving at their destination safely from people’s minds.

5 Airlines

Passengers suffering from the fear of flying are a niche market for airlines today, but with the rising trend in air travel, this is yet to change, which is why airlines, airports, and the private sector are all investing in the phenomenon (Kao et. al. 2020).

As the industry keeps expanding and passenger numbers rise, airlines are on the edge where the competition is determining their success. With this in mind, airlines must focus on new competitive behaviour and focus on improving service quality to exceed passengers' expectations, and therefore gain more market share in the future.

For airlines to be able to compete, multiple approaches are used to maintain competitive advantages, such as incentive pricing, convenient scheduling, safety, and improved services (Aggarwal et. al. 2013, Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008).
High service quality is a vital interest of airlines, as it improves passenger loyalty, can help in the growth of market share, and improve the service quality across the industry, where all stakeholders are beneficial (Aggarwal et. al. 2013; Kao et. al. 2020).

5.1 Airline passengers

As an airline customer, travel options are wide, however, for a person refusing to fly this is hardly the case. Fear of flying will negatively affect one´s personal life, as flying is not an option for a form of travel. This will limit both leisure and business opportunities, and thus career options and even relationships (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008). These prospect passengers are a niche the airlines could focus greater on in the future.

Passengers who suffer some level of fear may have specific requirements when taking a flight, such as an aisle seat for a possible faster evacuation situation or a seat by the window to avoid others on an aircraft. Cabin crew may also be subjected to a specific interview about things like weather conditions, delays, technical issues, or similar, to ensure anxious passengers being safe. Some passengers may even become aggressive when in an uncontrolled fearful situation, which is triggered by the anxiety in flying (Saadat et. al., 2014).

The majority of studies tend to focus on the interpretation of safety, which includes perceptions of crew professionalism, airport security, in-flight safety, and appearance of aircraft (Kao et. al. 2020; Koo et. al., 2018).

According to Fleischer et. al. (2015), safety information disclosure seems to be advantageous for airlines with low to medium safety levels, as enclosed information is not considered as questionable in the eyes of fearful passengers.

5.2 Fear of Flying Impact on Airlines

As Fleicher et. al. (2012) states, below are listed the factors from the airline's perspective:

1. Airline safety rankings are not considered meaningful unless provided. Debate is still ongoing regarding the advantages of such information revealed. If passed, this could encourage low to medium-ranked airlines to focus on improved safety levels to maintain competitiveness, and airlines already ranked as “safe”, would get the acknowledgment they deserve. Passengers with FoF, who do not currently fly, would then become new prospects of these airlines.
2. Home carriers enjoy an advantage positioning; passengers with FoF tend to favor their national carriers, as one's language is a fear alleviating attribute.
3. Fearful passengers are much less price-sensitive compared to regular passengers. Price elasticity increases as safety levels decreases. A major percentage is willing to pay only for beliefs and conceptions – feel of being safe over price.
4. Airlines with high safety rankings enjoy high assurance levels with all passengers (Fleicher et. al. 2012; Kao et. al. 2020)
5. In the eyes of the public, airlines are divided only into safe (airlines with a high safety record and airlines which do not reveal this info) and unsafe categories (Fleicher et. al. 2012; Kao et. al. 2020)

5.3 Airline accident survivals

As air crashes and accidents tend to have large media coverage, yet conditions have occurred where all passengers have survived the accident. Following the case with China Airlines flight CI120, the accident took place while the aircraft was parked on the tarmac. Passengers were interviewed after their evacuation.
Passengers’ safety behavior may be affected by the briefing and safety cards on board if paid attention to, however, a large number of passengers do not feel the need to go through the safety card (Chang & Yang, 2011).

A study conducted by Chang and Yang (2011), indicates that 69% of participants had watched the safety briefing, but only 14% thought it to be somewhat useful if a potential evacuation situation occurs.

In this accident, cabin crew members were found to be ineffective during the evacuation, however, Chang and Yang (2011) suggest that this perception may be due to passengers’ own willingness to cooperate when feeling trapped and not being aware of the standard procedures, a majority did not feel any need to study the safety card before takeoff (Chang & Yang, 2011).

This study indicates that the majority of passengers do not believe the possibility of an accident happening to oneself but shows that if a possible accident or incident occurs, it would have been beneficial to study the safety card and briefing in advance to reduce the overall evacuation time (Chang & Yang, 2011). In addition, as the safety instructions were not clear to many passengers, some attempting to drag their luggage with them, caused a severe blocking and cluster on the isles and became thus a life-threatening attribute of the whole evacuation process (Chang & Yang, 2011).

For an effective evacuation, the key component is proper communication between the pilots, crewmembers, and finally passengers (Chang & Yang, 2011).

These findings suggest, that when the aforementioned situation occurs, the real threat to passengers may also be the indifferent behavior towards procedures and thus fellow passengers, which may herewith cause a negative perception of crew professionalism and henceforth reflects a negative public image on the airline involved.

As these rare situations occur, airlines are trying to minimize the effect on public image, however, it may not always work in their best interest. Despite these relatively rare situations, it is highly unlikely for the industry to be able to eliminate such events, nevertheless as these unfortunate situations occur, should they be considered as free lessons for airlines, as they can learn and prevent reoccurrences or even lead to possible serious accidents, which then has an effect on negative public image and thus influences and breed fear of flying (Rose 2004).

6 Cabin Crew questionnaire

Due to the current situation with the Covid-19 pandemic, initially planned interviews were forced to convert into Webropol questionnaire. This was primarily to ensure the safety of interviewees and the interviewer and to follow the national restrictions regarding gatherings and meetings in unnecessary situations.

Webropol survey was created in the platform by carefully creating and thus selecting questions to better understand the current situation with cabin crew members when confronting passengers who suffer from FoF. Link to the survey was then sent directly to ten respondents who agreed to answer. The link was sent twice within a month, from which five (5) answers were collected in total. The survey link was posted on LinkedIn as well to attract prospects through a portal full of aviation professionals and cabin crew connections. One answer was collected via LinkedIn share.

The questions on the survey are based on what was taken from current literature and what seemed to be lacking. As current research and literature aim to focus mainly on the reduction of fear by a method that does not concern members of the cabin crew, this research primarily target was to find the link between passengers and cabin crew members and what these professionals with years of experience have to say about this.

A current Aviation Business student from the AbBa19 cohort was the main contact between the author and the cabin crew members participating in this survey. Many of these cabin crew members have a history of working with an airline for several years, also as trainers of new prospects.

Having such an experienced group of professionals to cooperate with, a strong perception of the current situation and improvement areas were found.

6.1 Research methods

To be able to justify the chosen research method, a research problem together with the desired objectives needs to be determined (Dvora et. al., 2011; Fang et. al. 2020). Multiple research approaches exist; however, they are usually divided into two categories; qualitative and quantitative method (Fang et. al. 2020; (Gobo et. al. 2004)

A qualitative method was chosen for this research since it best serves the objectives of this study, where the aim was to identify how members of the cabin crew believe their current methods work on fearful passengers and how would they alter the training of future cabin crew members, as they confront passengers with FoF on their daily work.

As members of the cabin crew are the primary contact of passengers when seeking any assistance on board. cabin crew members became a natural choice to focus on. Since members of the cabin crew tend to have first-hand information and experiences regarding fearful passengers on board, their personal experiences became the core of this research.

For qualitative data, such as opinions, reflections, experiences, and thoughts in this particular research, provide a holistic overlook of the phenomenon at hand, and thus enables a deeper understanding of the current situation.

6.1.1 Qualitative research as a method

Research begins by determining either a research problem or a question (Dvora et. al., 2011; Altinay et al. 2016). Once the objectives are clear, a method can be determined (Fang et. al. 2020). The two main methods, qualitative and quantitative, are both enabling to conduct of in-depth studies regarding the problem or question at hand (Altinay et al. 2016).

The quantitative method best serves research in which the main objective is to focus on rather quantitatively measuring numerical data, whereas the qualitative method tends to focus primarily on open-ended and descriptive outcome with the intention to deeper examine or investigate an issue from which the current research seems limited (Altinay et al. 2016). In quantitative research, numerical data is gathered and later subjected to analysis when all studied data can be converted to findings (Gobo et. al. 2004).

Qualitative research is about describing a phenomenon rather than generalizing assumptions (Dvora et. al., 2011; Altinay et al. 2016). When trying to solve the when, where, why, or who, the qualitative method is to choose. In qualitative research, the researcher's subjective interpretation plays a role in the outcome of the study, as qualitative research is about examining a phenomenon from an angle that is set by the researcher herself (Gobo et. al. 2004).

The mixed-method is a description of research, where both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used parallel, such as in research, where numerical data is gathered,

and qualitative practices applied in addition to supporting the research objectives (Altinay et al. 2016).

6.1.2 Justification of chosen method

Research ideas may often generate from the author's personal experience, background, perspective, and values (Dvora et. al., 2011). With research aiming to determine visions, perspectives, and best practices, a qualitative methodology will best serve the objective of such research.

As this research primarily focuses on cabin crews´ personal experiences and best practices based on views, visions, and opinions, the qualitative research method thus came the natural choice for conducting this research.

The qualitative method focuses on lived experiences in context what are respondents doing and saying both verbally and non-verbally. It focuses on participants' local meanings that their viewpoints, meanings, stories, and points of view rather than imposing an external researcher's perspective. With rich and holistic qualitative research, it can tell a story in a form of the data collected.

7 Results

As the questionnaire was mostly created with open-ended questions, it gave respondents the ability to fill in thoughts they found to be valuable.

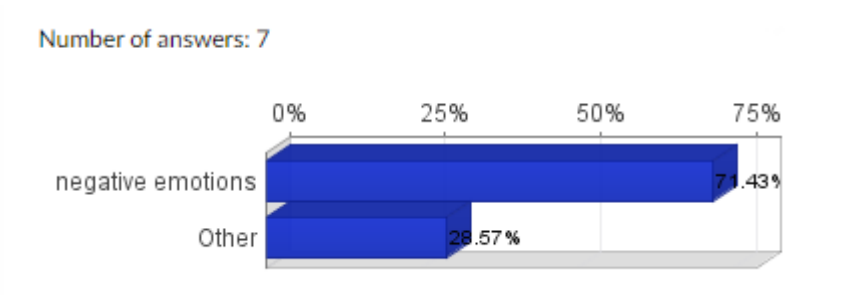
With a face-to-face interview, more in-depth answers might have been collected due to possible deeper examination of each answer and thus additional questioning. As the current situation with the Covid-19 pandemic tends to be serious and all unnecessary gatherings reduced to a minimum, real-time live interviews were not an option.

Below is each answer summarised question by question.

1. How do you recognize/identify a fearful passenger? Please elaborate.

Respondents seem quite unanimous about the factors which help identify a passenger with FoF. Some passengers may tell the cabin members that they are afraid to fly, if not, the behavior will speak for them.

Chart 1. Emotions are shown by fearful passengers (Webropol 2021)



Passengers often ask a lot of questions from the very start, even at the front door when first entering the aircraft, nervously looking around and screening the environment. Some passengers tend to even look a bit pale and sick, which is considered a clear sign of being anxious. Some passengers tend to follow cabin crew members with their eyes while seated; looking for a sign of some kind to see if the situation is in control. Rude and aggressive behavior may also indicate fear levels of some kind.

2. How does the practical work (on how to deal with a fearful passenger) differ from what you were taught in the course?

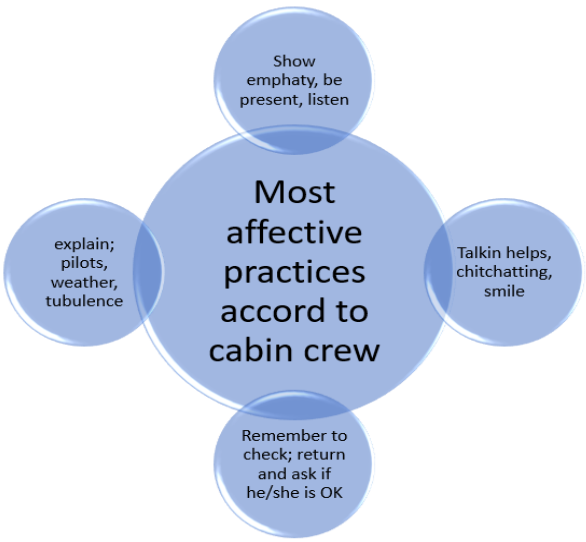
As every fearful passenger behaves and acts differently, respondents seem to be adapting their taught and new ways to deal with every individual passenger. Respondents seem to think that on the course, the ways they were taught are quite universal and that situations are different with every passenger and require adapting to the situation at hand.

When confronting a fearful passenger, it may take a lot of time to reassure the passenger and alleviate their fear in sometimes unique situations, which is not possible every time, since the cabin crew members have strict procedures of their job description when airborne. This may sometimes affect negatively the conversation with a passenger, as cabin crew members may need to leave in the middle of the situation.

3. What have you found to be the most effective ways/practices for fear alleviating attributes during the flight?

Trust. With the answers collected from respondents, trust between a cabin crew member and a passenger seem to be a key factor to be able to build an open conversation where the passenger can be reassured and convinced of being safe and not in any danger.

Figure 3. Most effective practices according to cabin crew

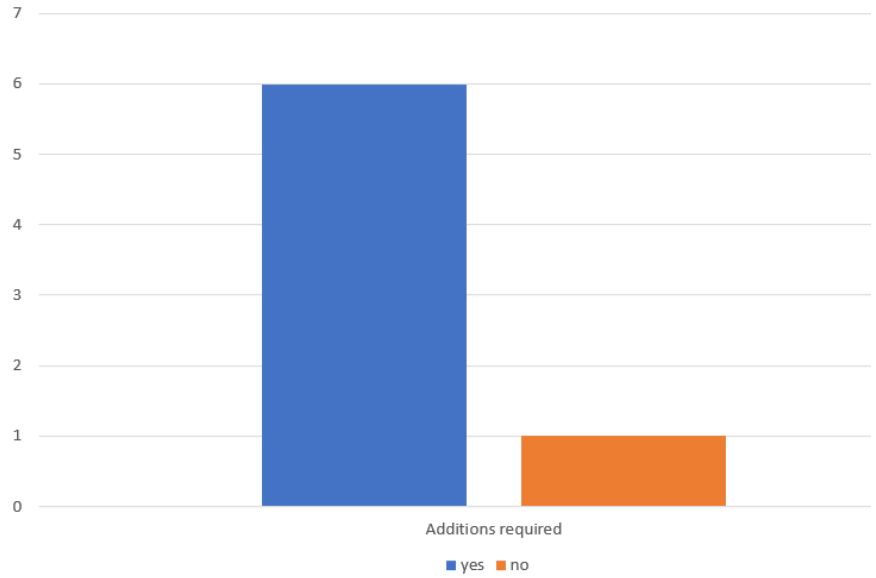


Empathy towards the passenger and his/her situation, being able to show that calmness can reduce anxiety.

4. If you were given the option to alter the training of cabin crew members on how to alleviate passengers' fear, what would it be? What would you add or remove and why?

The majority of respondents seem to consider the current methods taught on the course to be effective or see no specific reason to alter the training, however, empathy and calmness are seen to be underlined during training. As every passenger and thus situation is different, not a singular procedure can be applied to all. Where one passenger needs frequent attention and someone to talk to, another passenger may want to be left completely alone.

Chart 2. Additions required in cabin crew training.



Even the respondents seemed to respect and value their current training methods, six of the seven respondents would like to underline, adjust, or implement some new practices or methods.

Respondents suggest, that as every individual is different, basic things that could be applied in most of the cases are, sharing your own experiences, show that you care and give time if possible, listen and reassure, facts about flight safety together with a calm and understanding attitude. As these basic ways have been found helpful, respondents suggest these ways could be adjusted in the training program.

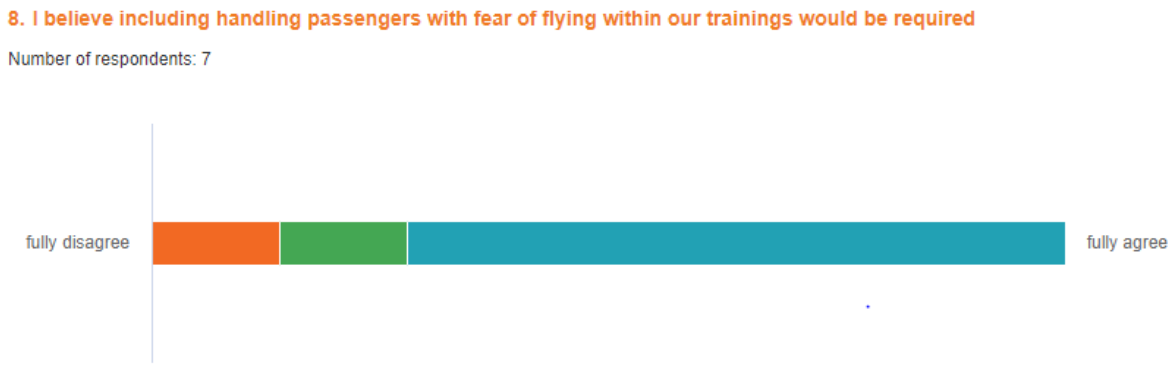
5. Have you noticed any change in passenger behavior over the time you have worked as a cabin crew member? If so, please elaborate.

No major or noticeable change in passenger behavior according to the majority of respondents, however, some respondents stated that increased use of sedative substances has become a phenomenon that may cause unexpected behavior. Fearful passengers tend to also use more alcohol and other seductive drugs such as medication, to alleviate their fearful being and anxiety.

6. I believe including handling passengers with a fear of flying would be required

75.4 percent of the respondents seem to highly value training including handling passengers with a fear of flying. The below chart demonstrates its relevance between different respondents.

Chart 3. Distribution of importance seen for FoF training.



	1	2	3	4	5		Average	Median
fully disagree	0.0%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	71.4%	fully agree	4.3	5.0

Even the majority of respondents fully agree with the fear of flying being a part of cabin crew training, not all fully agree. The average is 4.3 on a scale from 1-5 demonstrates the importance of having training on how to deal with fearful passengers on the cabin crew course.

7.1 Emotions as Identifier for Fearful Passengers

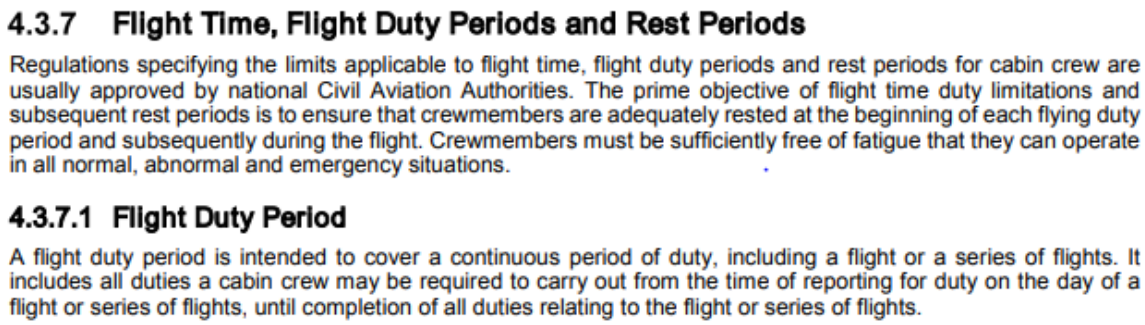
Among many clear indicators of fear according to respondents, such as visible anxiety, some signs are not considered as clear. According to Foreman & Van Gerwen (2008), as all humans are individuals, so are our ways to react. When a passenger feels his/her life is in danger, some may even start to act aggressively when panicking, this is usually a result

of a situation where the passenger feels a life-threatening situation getting out of hand and the ability to take control of the situation is too overwhelming (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008)

7.2 Reality versus Training in Handling Fear of Flying: Differences in Practical Work

As crew members have strict procedures to follow during a flight, they may not always have as much time as a fearful passenger might need and may thus unable the passenger to relax.

Picture 6. IATA Cabin Operations Safety Best Practices Guide Edition (2017)



4.3.7 Flight Time, Flight Duty Periods and Rest Periods

Regulations specifying the limits applicable to flight time, flight duty periods and rest periods for cabin crew are usually approved by national Civil Aviation Authorities. The prime objective of flight time duty limitations and subsequent rest periods is to ensure that crewmembers are adequately rested at the beginning of each flying duty period and subsequently during the flight. Crewmembers must be sufficiently free of fatigue that they can operate in all normal, abnormal and emergency situations.

4.3.7.1 Flight Duty Period

A flight duty period is intended to cover a continuous period of duty, including a flight or a series of flights. It includes all duties a cabin crew may be required to carry out from the time of reporting for duty on the day of a flight or series of flights, until completion of all duties relating to the flight or series of flights.

IATA cabin operations best practice guide gives an example of the importance of cabin crew duties during a flight. This suggests, that to maintain the required safety levels of a given flight, all crew members must follow the practices given by them. All duties and tasks are for the best interest of all passengers and crew on board, thus it may not necessarily feel that way to an individual passenger in a need of emotional support.

A solution to best serve fearful passengers in a time where all crew members are busy in their operational duties could come in handy.

7.3 Fear alleviating attributes according to Cabin Crew

Respondents seem to underline empathy towards the passenger and his/her situation. As Foreman & Van Gerwen (2008) has studied the behavior of fearful passengers, they seem to agree with the findings and that as calmness can reduce anxiety, it works the other way around as well, as nervousness and anxiety can catch from one passenger to another.

This is an indicator of the importance of cabin crew professionalism and thus ability to read the situation at hand.

7.4 Altering Cabin Crew training according to cabin crew

In the IATA cabin operations best practice guide, a crew resource management section provides overall guidelines for crew members on how to best apply their training and practical knowledge in a situation new to them.

As is stated in the guide; *"While operators aim to encourage appropriate contributions from all crewmembers to ensure a consistently high level of safe and efficient operations, together with service excellence, it is important to note that training cannot cover every possible scenario a crew may face. CRM is an essential component of safety training. It allows airlines to influence the way that cabin crew and flight crew work more effectively together by providing the technical and behavioral skills necessary for each to know what to expect from their fellow crewmembers in any given situation. It is recommended that CRM form an integral part of initial and recurrent/refresher cabin crew training programs"* (IATA 2017), which is a clear indicator to the fact that as not every single event is not possible to pre-practice, all crew members must obtain a skill to adapt as possible situations occur. Airlines of course have standard operating procedures of their own, but these guidelines of IATA indicate that not all can be practiced in advance, but rather give the crew members practical and holistic guidance on how to interact with different people and thus apply the best practices.

A majority of respondents seem to think a few basic attributes work better than others, airlines could underline those proved to be effective methods in cabin crew training as they promote individual approach according to the respondents.

7.5 Change in passenger behavior over the years

No clear indicator was identified among the respondents, however, if no changes in passenger behavior are detected regarding the fear of flying, it can be assumed, that as a shift from generations is slowly moving towards the industry as a whole (IATA 2018), there will most likely be changes in passengers characteristics as well.

Sedative medication and alcohol were identified as an increasing phenomenon, and that is not likely to change, at least not among fearful passengers, since both are considered as a self-help treatment to reduce fear and anxiety (Foreman & Van Gerwen, 2008).

7.6 Including handling passengers with a fear of flying in cabin crew training

Current training is considered good and holistic in general, however, as respondents have identified some attributes to be more effective than others, handling passengers with a fear of flying should remain as a part of cabin crew training.

As IATA (2017) underlines in the Cabin Operations Safety Guide, passengers may also be a threat to aviation safety, especially on board, including handling passengers with a fear of flying is a must in cabin crew training.

7.7 Conclusions

All respondents have been working as members of the cabin crew for over three years, thus their insights are valuable and trustworthy, however, as the truth is in the eye of the beholden, these results do not consider the opposite experience, which is the passengers perspective.

Since the answers were quite similar between all of the respondents, and certain attributes were repeated, it can be assumed, that these results apply to other airlines and cabin crew as well. Even the results may seem obvious, this topic had not been studied earlier, which may conclude to the result that cabin crew relation to the fear of flying needs to be further research as a phenomenon to fully understand it and thus dealt with in the future.

Still, these results indicate that there is a need to re-evaluate the current working methods of airlines on how the cabin crew should confront and deal with passengers suffering from FoF. It can be understood from the responses, that as all passengers may behave differently and are unique, not a single or one-fits-all ways should be taught on cabin crew courses regarding passengers with a fear of flying, but to teach universal proven to be effective ways of confronting fearful passengers.

Respondents are unanimous regarding components that help to alleviate passengers' fears and anxiety. Rarely, one fits all, however, as empathy and listening seemed to have positive results according to cabin crew members, these techniques should be deeply emphasized in current and future training.

From the answers, it can be understood, that it is not always possible to spend enough time with a passenger that would require specific attention from a cabin crew member, as the situations and timings are subject to change during a flight. Still, to find a mutual solution benefitting both parties, a way to be able to respond to the attention a passenger may require cannot be argued. As so-called dwell time amongst cabin crew is limited and thus reduced from time spent chatting with passengers, a perhaps digital solution could be an option to consider.

A solution that would be beneficial for the arising number of fearful passengers and airlines confronting these individuals, needs to be found. As the amount of cabin crew per flight is most likely not about to be raised, more effective ways need further investigation.

No life-threatening situations regarding fearful passengers had occurred during any of the respondents' careers as cabin crew.

7.8 Reliability and validity

As the researcher may have the vision to find a solution for a specific question or problem, it may sometimes lead to analyzing results in a way that best serves the author's specific theoretical interest (Giampietro et. al. 2004).

Qualitative research is about interpretation, where there is usually no singular truth, and miscommunication may cause falsely interpreted results, as different words may have a different meaning for different people (Dvora et. al., 2011). What the researcher seems to hold as truth, can often project that world (Dvora et. al., 2011).

The interview enables additional questioning and deeper examination of certain answers whereas a questionnaire is limited to what the writer holds to be sufficient (Clive et. al., 2004).

The focus of this research was solely on cabin crew members and thus limits the results for employee visions and views. As passengers are the ones suffering from FoF, research focusing on passenger opinion and visions would be required to determine whether the means and best practices according to cabin crew are seen as such in the eyes of fearful passengers.

As respondents did not seem to have any specific ideas on how to alter the training with new or fresh ways to reduce their workload or ease their work, additional questioning, such as questions regarding personal workload during a flight or distribution of certain elements into the personal entertainment system could have been applied into the questionnaire. This would have possibly enabled respondents to use more creative thinking and deduct compulsive and limiting thinking regarding ways to alleviate passengers' fears and anxieties.

8 Suggestions

According to cabin crew respondents, no major changes are seen necessary to deal with fearful passengers, however, this may not be the absolute truth. Respondents may have felt their workload was a limiting factor when asked for suggestions regarding ideas for improvements.

A cover letter underlining the beforementioned aspect could have been a key factor with collecting the answers and may have affected respondents in such a way, that all their possible limiting factors regarding improvement ideas could have been reduced. However, as respondents seemed to have a very down-to-earth approach on how to confront fearful passengers and since being present, listening, and emphasizing were seen as the most important attributes, suggestions are based on that.

As several airlines have their state-of-the-art electronic entertainment systems adjusted in modern airplanes, could the contents regarding programs, be personated in such a way, that in a situation with fearful passengers, remote mental support would be available for passengers.

If such a solution would be invented and thus applied, could it be a time-saving attribute for cabin crew? This would also streamline and intensify the capacity and utilization of cabin crew since the time-consuming functions would be reduced to a certain extent.

Human interaction should not be reduced totally, although as it may be limited due to compulsory tasks and duties of cabin crew, some fear alleviating attributes could be integrated into the entertainment system, which is already installed on many aircraft.

Further research is needed to determine what are key attributes passengers see as the most effective ones. As the current literature seems quite scarce regarding cabin crew relation to fear of flying, it may give great value to all stakeholders to research this topic for further reference.

9 Discussion

As the results highly point out the importance of cabin crew presence for passengers who suffer from fear of flying, alternative, and additional solutions would be beneficial of use so that with growing numbers in FoF would not increase the workload of cabin crew, but rather complement their daily work with fearful and anxious passengers.

If some beforementioned ideas seemed to have any value in the future, further research and thus testing is needed. This would then point out possible flaws and discrepancies within the ideas suggested above and in addition, could help further researchers determine the correct orientation in this matter.

This research gives a holistic overlook of the topic and can thus be seen as an informative work for airlines and other stakeholders in aviation.

Questions remain whether airline crew with a certain behavior or attributes harm fear of flying. As this research paper primarily focuses on fear alleviating methods used by cabin crew, future research may help to determine if passengers are contributing to this vision of cabin crew and if a certain behavior or attributes among crew members have a reverse impact on passengers' fear of flying.

10 Own learning

This research has not only been a learning experience like no other but has served the author personally as well since the author herself has suffered from a severe fear of flying already ten years and FoF became thus the main research topic.

Several research projects have taken place during the years studying at Haaga-Helia University Applied Sciences, still, as this has been the only person one, the author strongly believes not only the applicable outcome of this work but as a valuable piece of work for which can be seen as a running start for future research for this given topic, which seems quite under-researched.

As the Covid-19 pandemic has been ongoing during this research, it has set multiple limitations for the project, however, due to the online tools available, it has not affected the outcome of this research.

While writing the results, it became clear, that some changes and additional questioning would have given deeper insights and more valuable information regarding the later suggestions given in this work. Questionnaire respondents seemed to give quite universal opinions and ideas about the work regarding passengers with a fear of flying, thus a live interview or in-depth questionnaire would have better served the purpose of this research.

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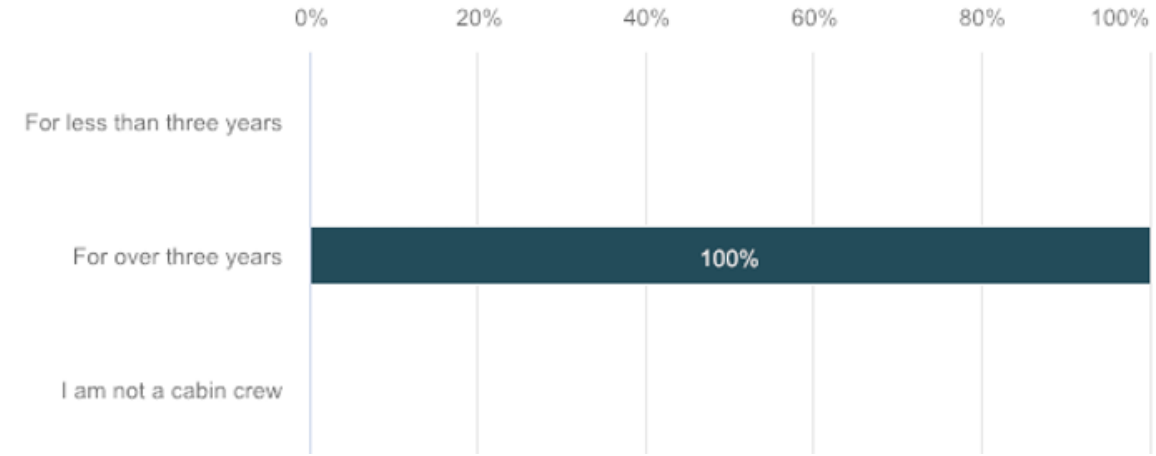
Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions and answers

1. How long have you been a flight attendant?

Number of respondents: 7



2. How do you recognize/identify a fearful passenger? Please elaborate.

Number of respondents: 7

Responses
Often they tell you when embarking the aircraft. Sometimes you notice it when the passenger asks a lot of questions about the weather, the aircraft, turbulence or such. Some can be anxious, a bit aggressive or very nervous. Even crying.
They say it to you.
If passengers wont greet at the door, seem a bit "lost", being nervous. Most of the times they say it themself at the door
Screening behaviour, usually they seem nervous and scared or anxious.
Body language, expressions, by them (pax) telling about it
Every now and then they tell me already at the door. But if not they often behave nervose. Worst cases may even look a bit sick with pale face and swety
Looks around nervously whilst seated, keeps a close eye on cabin crews every move. Nervous jittering. Very often they tell that they are afraid. Simetimes a fearful passanger can behave rudely

3. How does the practical work (on how to deal with a fearful passenger) differ from what you were taught in the course?

Number of respondents: 7

Responses
It can take more time, sometimes a fearful customer need attention and someone to talk to. On full flights, that is not always possible.
No difference.
For fearful passengers it is important to pay more attention to them, and ask how are they doing. 80% of the passengers are afraid of takiing and landing. sometimes it is better to re-seat them by the window or close to cc, so they can talk -> get their attention somewhere else.
It is more listening and reassuring, just being a human for there present for them. Creating a warm connection.
Everyone is different and depending on the pax in question you need to adapt to their specific needs.
Not much since we were not tought any precise procedure but rather open ways to deal with fearful customer
Every fesrful passenger requires attention and support in different ways. Some wants to talk and be explained every noise snd sound of the a/c. Some do not want to know. Some are scared due to loss of control, some of small space

4. What have you found to be the most effective ways/practices for fear alleviating attributes during the flight?

Number of respondents: 7

Responses
Being calm and reassuring the passenger. Talking about facts but also chitchatting about other things. Emphathy helps. I usually also emphasize that our pilots are very skillful and the aircraft well maintained.
Show that you care and that you take it seriously.
Explain what is happening. Sometimes they are scared because they dont know what is going on and how it happens.

Smiling, talking and keeping the mood light. Sometimes touching helps, for example if it os turbulent. Usually just saying that I am here let me know is enough.
be present and calm, listen
Emphaty. Often just listening. People already feel better when they can talk to someone. And then I tell them: Please let me know if there is anything I can do for you. So they know there is someone who understand.
To go back to the passenger frequently. To ask how they are doing. Telling in advance if we know of turbulence or bad weather conditions. Telling them that they are brave for being able to come onboard eventhough they are fearful

5. If you were given the option to alter the training of cabin crew members on how to alleviate passengers' fear, what would it be? What would you add or remove and why?

Number of respondents: 7

Responses
Emphathy should be emphasized. Fearful customers need attention and usually giving facts is helpful but an emphatetic attitude from the crew is the key factor.
I would not change anything.
Being able to let them in to the flight deck so they could see
I would emphasize that it is a unnatural and not that regular for passenger with fear of flying. It is just physocology- smiling and calm mood and being close to the person as a human is a good practice. Not making it a big deal.
to have people who are afraid of flying telling their own stories on fears and feelings. They are the experts in the fear issue - we listen, try to understand and reassure with our experience and knowledge.
I would underline listening to a customer. There is no right answer to everybody because people are different and they have different reasons behind. Just give them your time and show that you care.
To explain that passengers are scared due to dif reasons. Some benefit to have frequent attention from the crew some want to be left alone

6. Has there been any life-threathening situations caused by a fearful passenger(s)? If so, please elaborate.

Number of respondents: 6

Responses
No
No.
No
no
No
None

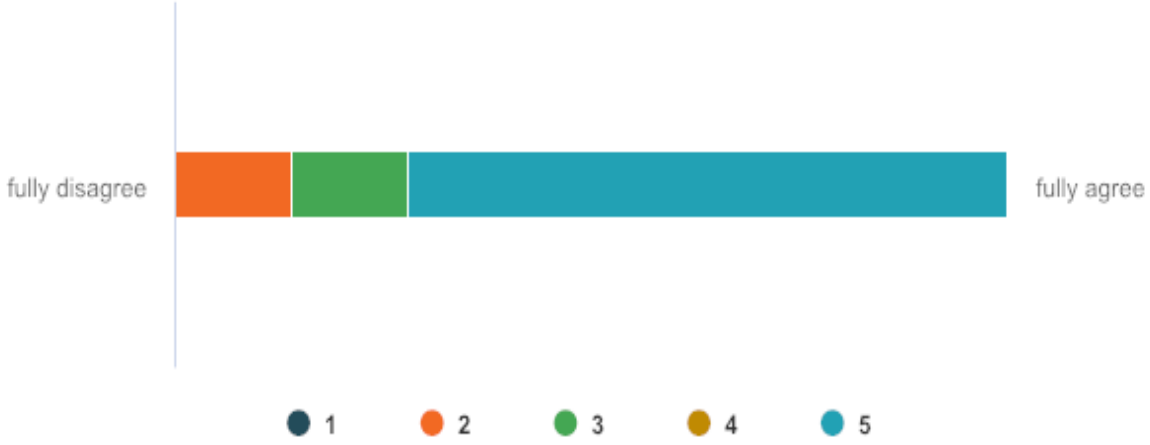
7. Have you noticed any change in passenger behavior over the time you have worked as a cabin crew member? If so, please elaborate.

Number of respondents: 7

Responses
All in all, there are more customers using all sorts of substances- not only alcohol. Medications or drugs used with alcohol can lead to all kinds of unexpected behavior. It is possible that customers who have a fear of flying also use some kind of medication or drink alot.
When I started 25 yesrs ago, fear of flying was not that common. It seems that now fear of flying is little bit ” fashionable”.
No I havent. It is important to stay empahtical (empaattinen) and professional and be reachable (käytettävissä ja läheisyydessä)
No
cannot say
Absolutely. Today customers are very used to flying. It is no longer something to look forward to. There is nothing special about it but rather a must.
In context with fearful passengers no

8. I believe including handling passengers with a fear of flying within our training would be required

Number of respondents: 7



	1	2	3	4	5		Total	Average	Median
fully disagree	0	1	1	0	5	fully agree	7	4.3	5
	0%	14.3%	14.3%	0%	71.4%				
Total	**0**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**5**		**7**	**4.3**	**5.0**