



Flight Attendants' Perception of Occupational Stress on Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment in a Post-Pandemic Era

Woraprat Yoelao¹

¹Faculty of Business, Economics and Communications, Naresuan University, Thailand

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Abstract

The outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in Flight attendants suffering from occupational stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. This research sought to examine the effects of COVID-19 on flight attendants' perceptions of stress factors in their work and also aimed to investigate the roles of job satisfaction and organizational commitment among cabin crew members following the pandemic. 29 cabin crew were interviewed. Q-methods were applied to explore the varying perspectives of occupational stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The results suggest that occupational stress occurs from job insecurity and financial issue, and welfare benefit is related to job satisfaction and commitment in a post-pandemic.

Keywords: 1) COVID-19 2) Occupational stress 3) Job satisfaction 4) Organizational commitment 5) Flight attendants

¹ Lecturer, Department of Tourism; E-mail: worapraty@nu.ac.th



Introduction

In China, in December 2019, a mysterious new form of pneumonia began to appear. The cause was not known, and despite the efforts of the Chinese authorities to control the outbreak, it quickly became a health emergency which drew global attention. A seafood market close to the epicenter of the outbreak in Wuhan was identified in January 2020 as the likely origin of the new disease according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the market was promptly closed. The suspected novel coronavirus was given the temporary names 2019-nCoV, or COVID-19 (Foo, et al., 2021, p. 1). As case numbers grew rapidly around the world, governments began to take increasingly severe actions to address the emergency (Kim, et al., 2020, p. 633). As a consequence, the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant damage to the travel sector. The virus was believed to have spread initially via air transport, and most nations chose to close their borders and place travel restrictions to limit the movement of potentially infected people (Daon, Thompson and Obolski, 2020, p. 2). The aviation industry saw a decrease in scheduled flights while passenger numbers fell by as much as 95% compared to the pre-pandemic period (Shepardson and Rucinski, 2020). In the post-pandemic period, it will be necessary to examine the effects of the crisis in greater detail in order for the aviation sector to better understand how future crises might be handled and how to operate air transportation businesses more effectively in the light of the changes experienced (Akbar and Kisilowski, 2020, p. 88; Kao, Wang and Farquhar, 2020, p. 89; Lamb, et al., 2021, p. 94). As the

airlines were forced to limit their operations, they faced financial challenges which in turn resulted in airline staff losing their jobs (Edgecliffe-Johnson, 2020).

Furthermore, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic placed airline staff in a highly vulnerable position in terms of potential exposure to infection (Maneenop and Kotcharin, 2020, p. 2). The industry relies upon interpersonal exchanges, so it was impossible for staff to avoid working closely with other people, thus placing them at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 (Amankwah-Amoah, 2020, p. 271; Sobieralski, 2020, p. 2; Han, et al., 2021, pp. 460-467). This ever-present threat caused anxiety among many employees who felt that they were unable to protect themselves due to their work (Yang and Lau, 2019, pp. 1-10). Fear of the virus, which was heightened during the periods of severe outbreaks, had a damaging effect upon the mental health of air transport workers (Shoss, 2017, p. 1911). Notably, COVID-19 not only presented the initial threat of illness, which could be serious, but could also lead to long-term health complications including breathing difficulties, pain in the muscles, tiredness, or depression (Wamsley, 2021). In such conditions, employees have been fearful about working, and equally fearful about losing the opportunity to work in the future (Wong, et al., 2021, p. 1).

Earlier studies have identified certain occupational stress factors as important predictors of staff commitment, job satisfaction, well-being, performance, prosocial behavior, and turnover intention (Hwang, Hyun and Park, 2014, pp. 241-261; Kim and Hwang, 2015, pp. 68-82; Yang and Lau, 2019, pp. 1-10; Kang, et

al., 2020, p. 84; Darvishmotevali and Ali, 2020, p. 2). This is relevant in the context of airline staff since they are exposed to the possibility of viral infection because of their working conditions and the demands of the job they perform. The ever-present threat of job losses along with the stress of performing high risk work have resulted in higher turnover rates among flight attendants (Chen, et al., 2023, pp. 95-108). The pandemic therefore caused rising occupational stress in tandem with falling job satisfaction and organization commitment throughout the aviation industry, but especially for cabin crew. Consequently, it is important for airlines to find ways to improve morale among cabin crew so that they feel a stronger attachment to the airline and deliver elevated levels of performance. Improving job satisfaction and commitment is an important strategy to achieve these goals during the post-pandemic era (Han, et al., 2022, p. 2). Failure to achieve these aims could have severe consequences for airlines facing an uncertain economic outlook in the near future (Bangkokpost, 2023).

This research sought to examine the effects of COVID-19 upon cabin crew perceptions of stress factors in their work, and also aimed to investigate the roles of job satisfaction and organizational commitment among cabin crew members following the pandemic. An exploratory qualitative approach is employed in order to better understand the type of stress factor which might have an impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Snowball convenience sampling was used to select a total of 29 flight attendants for analysis, whereupon content analysis was carried out to assess perceptions of job stress, satisfaction, and commitment in the post-COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

Effects upon airlines

Experts on the aviation sector have pointed out that border closures and travel restrictions which caused passenger numbers to collapse have significantly increased the risk of bankruptcy for airlines that were making losses (Foo, et al., 2020, pp. 1-2). IATA records also indicate that airline share prices also crashed as the pandemic and its effects developed, with the greatest falls coming during the initial pandemic phase of February to April 2020. Shareholders were clearly adversely affected and the capital value of the industry as a whole declined sharply. Share prices were hit throughout the world, with airlines from every region suffering. This wave of falling share prices began in January 2020 with Asia's carriers the first feel the effects due to their proximity and exposure to China (Dube, Nhamo and Chikodzi, 2021, p. 2).

Most Airline businesses had indispen- sably to lay off substantial staff as widespread travel bans caused by the coronavirus have largely grounded the global aviation industry. Al Baker said Qatar Airways needs to cut the number of employees laid off would be substantial and include members of its cabin crew. He also stated "The unparalleled impact on our industry has caused significant challenges for all airlines and we must act decisively to protect the future of our business" (Aljazeera, 2020). In Thailand, the effects of COVID-19 on aviation were particularly problematic, with a majority of flights being suspended. The national flag carrier, Thai Airways International, had long been making losses and was forced to seek assistance in bankruptcy courts in 2020 (Charennit, 2021, pp. 1-2). With the fleet



largely grounded, the airline was obliged to formulate a plan for a business rehabilitation plan to overcome its liquidity issues. As part of the plan, around 5,000 employees agreed to take early retirement, while many others were encouraged to go on unpaid leave. Others were laid off, albeit with some financial assistance through a basic remuneration package (Charernnit, 2021, pp. 1-2). Likewise, Asia's Boutique Airline, Bangkok Airways placed many staff on unpaid leave as flights were canceled, while even at the executive level salaries were cut (Bangkokpost, 2020).

From a more global perspective, however, IATA noted that improvements began to appear in 2023 as yields strengthened and costs were well managed despite higher prices for fuel. The Director General of IATA, Willie Walsh, explained that many carriers were profitable enough to be able to obtain the necessary capital to thrive in the future while the industry as a whole sought to move away from carbon. However, a large number of airlines continued to face difficulties as a consequence of high costs, strict regulation, poor infrastructure, ill-advised government policy, and sometimes simply the wrong location to take advantage of the opportunities offered by greater connectivity. It was explained further that an uncertain economic outlook ensures that managing airlines in the coming years will be a challenging task (Bangkokpost, 2023).

Factors related to occupational stress

For those working within the airline industry, occupational stress is a significant issue, and has been the focus of numerous studies since it can affect the performance of whole organizations (Kim, et al., 2022, pp. 30-47; Chua, et al., 2021, pp. 985-1002). In the field of

human resources management, occupational stress is seen as a key challenge. In aviation, many studies have examined the effects of stress, especially in the context of airline cabin crew. Stress can be considered a safety risk for passengers because the crew has responsibility for the safety of flights, and stress can reduce their overall performance levels through its effects upon mental health. Lee, et al. (2022, p. 4) recently reported that stress at work was one key factor leading to the intention of workers to leave their jobs as flight attendants, while Stickle and Scott (2016, pp. 27-38) added that the risk of physical harm in the workplace will inevitably increase the likelihood of occupational stress. Chen, et al., (2023, pp. 95-108) observed that when flight attendants believe they face a heightened risk of COVID-19 infection at work, this will adversely affect their intention to continue working, thus leading to higher industry levels of turnover. Jackson, Schwab and Schuler (1986, p. 630) claimed further that occupational stress took the form of a transactional phenomenon arising when an individual interacted with the working environment, while Parker and DeCotiis (1983, pp. 160-177) explained that job stress was a feeling in the workplace which was unwelcome and abnormal, and could arise as a consequence of demands or limitations at work related to the tasks involved in the job. The performance and productivity of staff will be directly affected by job stress, as it is understood that stressed employees are less efficient (Ahmed and Ramzan, 2013, pp. 61-68). Some researchers have therefore focused specifically upon the effects of stress on flight attendants (Sakhaie, et al., 2020, p. 56; Lee, Choi and Hyun, 2022; Chuaychoo and Tunjoy, 2022, p. 160). Workers in the service sector, such as flight attendants,

often experience stress because they must work closely with customers in a challenging work environment (Park and Kim, 2020, pp. 191-217), so it is vital for human resources managers to find ways to manage stress. When stress occurs over extended periods of time it lowers the employee's working performance (Akgunduz, 2015, p. 1082; Abdelhamied and Elbaz, 2018, p. 66), lowers job satisfaction (Shin, Choi and Hyun, 2022), leads to higher staff turnover (Chen, et al., 2023, p. 95), reduces creativity and productivity, and can even cause depression (Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004, p. 859). Accordingly, it is important for companies to find ways to minimize the stress placed upon their staff. They can do this by identifying factors which lead to stress, and attempting to address those issues to improve working conditions (Chuaychoo and Tunjoy, 2022, p. 160).

Job satisfaction and organization commitment

The literature contains a number of studies providing theoretical backing for the idea that job satisfaction can play a role in enhancing the attachment of employees to their employers and organizations, as well as improving their work performance (Sharma, Choudhary and Saini, 2021, pp. 75-86). Job satisfaction has been defined by as a long-term emotional attachment to a job or to certain duties within the role (Wright and Kim, 2004, pp. 18-40), while Locke (1969, pp. 309-336) described job satisfaction as a "pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's job values" (p. 316). Similarly, the idea that job satisfaction is linked to emotions and behaviors pertaining the value workers place upon their job was proposed by Golbasi, Kelleci and Dogan (2008, p.

1800). Locke (1969, pp. 309-336) added further that job satisfaction depends upon an individual's own complex perspective of the job, the requirements of the job, and the feeling towards the various components of the job in the context of the individual's feelings about their own value (Han, et al., 2022, p. 44).

A number of researchers concur on the importance of job satisfaction in governing the emotional relationship of staff with their organization, and in controlling productivity levels (Zhao, et al., 2016, p. 27). The influence of anxiety due to COVID-19 was studied by Shin, et al. (2022, pp. 901-918) in the context of self-esteem at work and flight attendants' job satisfaction. The findings confirmed that job satisfaction is affected by anxiety. This is important because job satisfaction must be increased in order to reduce employee turnover (Hsiao, et al., 2020, p. 76). Satisfied workers usually perceive their employers positively, and are therefore more likely to remain loyal to their organizations while performing to a higher standard (Scanlan and Hazelton, 2019, p. 581).

The field of organizational commitment covers a wide range of perceptions within the organization, both at the job level and in terms of the organizational qualities which can compel staff to feel an emotional attachment to their company and a willingness to remain involved over the longer term (Wong, et al., 2021, p. 2). It is possible to define organizational commitment as the psychological attachment of an individual to that organization (Leong, et al., 1996, p. 1345). Leong, et al., (1996, p. 1345) added that employees may develop feelings of greater stability and a sense of belonging as a result of organizational commitment (Song, et al., 2015, p. 455). Some research has shown that when considering the



turnover intentions of flight attendants, the two factors which exert the greatest influence are organizational commitment and job satisfaction, indicating in turn that if the areas of job satisfaction and organizational commitment are substantially improved, this will make flight attendants less likely to leave their jobs (Chen, 2006, p. 274; Firdaus, et al., 2022, p. 507; Dursun, Oztirak and Dursun, 2022, p. 12). Meyer and Allen (1997, p. 9) observed that strong relationships are essential between organizations and their staff because the psychological connection workers have with their employer becomes part of their identity (Song, et al., 2014, p. 455). Moreover, Shin, et al. (2022, p. 3) explained that organizational commitment is strengthened by job satisfaction, and therefore contributes to the success of the company. For this reason, job satisfaction is crucial, both for the employees themselves and for the organization in terms of performance. Flight attendants work closely with customers in front line service roles, so service will be enhanced when job satisfaction is high, leading to greater organization commitment and ultimately higher levels of customer satisfaction (Shin, et al., 2022, p. 5).

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was used in this research study for the purpose of evaluating perceptions of cabin crew members concerning occupational stress factors, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The qualitative approach was suitable due to the exploratory structure of the research, aiming to learn more about flight attendants' opinions. Litwin and Fink (1995, p. 309) noted that the ideal approach to sampling for such a study would be the snowball method, which is a non-pro-

bability technique offering the advantage over random sampling that the respondents will fit the purpose of the study (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 10). In snowballing, respondents are invited to ask their own colleagues to join, thus gaining more participants from a similar pool (Hauck and Stanforth, 2007, p. 175). A theoretical sampling approach examines unique profile combinations, considering a number of attributes, usually in the range of four to seven factors, while to achieve this would typically merit between five and eight interviews being carried out for each cell (Woodside, MacDonald and Burford, 2005, p. 73).

This research study performed interviews with a total of 29 flight attendants working at different domestic and international airlines. The interviewed also were collected in Bangkok between June and July 2023. These interviews were conducted in line with the "progressive and humanistic approach" promoted by Guba and Lincoln (1994, pp. 163-194), with an orderly transition from one topic to the next so that the interviewees would not feel uncomfortable or confused. The specific aims were i) to assess the flight attendants' definitions of their roles in the post-pandemic era, and ii) to gain a better understanding of how occupational stress factors are linked to job satisfaction and organization commitment at present.

There were three sections in the script for the interviews. The first prompted the respondents to discuss the roles and duties they were assigned as cabin crew following the pandemic. The next section considered occupational stress and its related factors in the context of job satisfaction and organization commitment. The final section takes a more quantitative approach, seeking to measure

perceptions of occupational stress factors. The items evaluated were drawn from the related literature and a 7-point Likert scale was employed to assess the responses, using a range from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. In addition, the interview gathered details pertaining to the profiles of the respondents. A pilot test of the interview script was carried out using five students and professors in Thailand. The interview format was largely narrative and without a rigid structure, and sought to draw respondents to offer details about the stress factor perceptions associated with flight attendant employment conditions. The interviews were typically around 90 minutes in length, and were recorded before being transcribed into English. It was believed that interviews would serve as the most suitable approach to obtain a holistic overview of the opinions of the respondents, covering current and previous employment roles, and stress factors associated with their duties and circumstances. Content analysis was then performed using the data from each of the interviews for the purpose of determining which were the common or prevalent themes arising in the study (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 10).

In order to provide an interpretation of the responses of the interviewees, content analysis was employed (Jennings, 2010, as cited in Correia, Kozak and Reis, 2016, p. 742) due to the depth of interpretation permitted on different levels and in differing contexts. Meanwhile, empirical exploratory research, or the Q method, was used to analyze the statements obtained from literature. This approach enables subjective perspectives to be evaluated, taking into consideration multiple different opinions,

in order to reach an approximation of a shared response from the participants (McKeown and Thomas, 2013, p. 17). The Q method is a mixed technique which helps to record the respondents’ opinions about particular topic areas (Stone and Turale, 2015, p. 183; Yildirim, 2017, p. 235; Karasu and Peker, 2019, pp. 40-42). Demir and Kul (2011, p. 295) explain that the Q method has its basis in both the statistical elements of a quantitative study and the clarity of qualitative approaches.

The study included a qualitative factor analysis in which 29 respondents were invited to arrange 51 statements which had been drawn from the relevant literature. Earlier studies employing the Q method have suggested that 30 respondents would be a suitable sample size (Brown, 1996, pp. 91-138), although other research has used samples of 12 (Boscolo and Cisotto, 1999, p. 209) and 26 (Chang, et al., 2008, p. 246). This study, with 29 participants, should therefore be well placed to accomplish similar outcomes. The process of Q sorting involved each respondent providing a subjective response to each of the statements, expressing views ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement. Q factor analysis created clusters of respondents instead of clusters of variables (Stenner, Cooper and Skevington, 2003, p. 2161). Respondents whose viewpoints were similar could be categorized into the same clusters, while a factor loading value could be determined in the case of each Q sort, reflecting its relationship with each of the factors. In the final set, the number of factors will be dependent upon the variability in each of the Q sorts (Webler, Danielson and Tuler, 2009, p. 16). This final set then underwent rotation to be assessed from



various angles, in line with accepted statistical principles. A better understanding of the subjective perspectives of the respondents was thus achieved via the interviews and factor analysis.

Results

On the basis of the data obtained in this research, classification into five different groups was possible, whereby each group offered eigenvalue in excess of 1, and a stan-

dard score (Z-score) starting at ± 1.00 (Yeun, 2005). The findings revealed that 72.4% of the 29 flight attendant participants were female, while 27.6% were male. The age of 34.5% respondents was 26-30, while 34.5% were aged 31-35. International airlines employed 72.4% of the respondents while 27.6% worked for domestic airlines. Finally, 51.7% had served as flight attendants for 6-10 years. These data can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Flight attendants' perceptions of work stress, satisfaction, and commitment

Q-sort	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	Gender	Airline	Age (year)	Experience (year)
1	0.626					M	Domestic	26-30	6-10
3	0.788					F	International	31-35	6-10
5	0.788					F	Domestic	31-35	6-10
8	0.821					F	Domestic	26-30	6-10
9	0.789					M	Domestic	26-30	6-10
14	0.558					F	Domestic	21-25	1-5
24	0.648					F	Domestic	40+	10+
11		0.586				M	Domestic	26-30	1-5
18		0.753				M	Domestic	26-30	1-5
19		0.563				F	Domestic	26-30	6-10
22		0.895				F	Domestic	36-40	10+
23		0.807				F	International	36-40	6-10
25		0.816				M	International	31-35	1-5
26		0.706				F	International	40+	1-5
6			0.606			F	International	31-35	1-5
20			0.549			M	Domestic	31-35	10+
21			0.524			F	Domestic	26-30	6-10
27			0.578			F	International	36-40	6-10
29			0.842			F	Domestic	26-30	6-10
4				0.546		F	International	31-35	6-10
7				0.654		F	Domestic	26-30	1-5
12				0.573		F	International	26-30	1-5
15				0.546		F	Domestic	21-25	1-5

Q-sort	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	Gender	Airline	Age (year)	Experience (year)
16				0.610		F	Domestic	31-35	6-10
17				0.676		M	Domestic	31-35	6-10
2					0.692	F	Domestic	31-35	6-10
10					0.521	F	Domestic	31-35	6-10
13					0.662	F	Domestic	31-35	6-10
28					0.564	F	Domestic	26-30	6-10

The opinions of the flight attendants with regard to occupational stress and stress factors, satisfaction in their jobs, and organizational commitment were obtained via the Q sorts, and placed emphasis upon satisfaction, commitment, employment insecurity, welfare benefits, turnover intention, and work anxiety, as shown in Table 2.

Flight attendants were eager to encourage others into this kind of work, and they

believed that their airline roles matched their skills and abilities. A number of participants reported receiving outstanding employee awards from their employer, which helped to promote loyalty, which is vital for any organization to succeed. Loyalty is closely linked to job satisfaction, while participants in this study reported concerns over expenditure.

Table 2 Statements for consideration: Job satisfaction and commitment

Items	Statements	Z-score
5	I think my work fits my aptitude	1.200
9	I would like to strongly recommend my job	2.219
14	I feel happy to spend the rest of my career in this airline	1.101
16	My company presents something about me	1.082
50	I have to consider more price-conscious expenditure	2.200

As a consequence of the recent pandemic, flight attendants now face a lack of job security, while during the pandemic itself, many staff saw their hours reduced and their benefits reduced, while others were forced to take unpaid leave or lost their jobs. In the post-pandemic period, many returned to their original

airline while others moved to different airlines. Their familiarity with the airline roles means they might not fit easily into other jobs. The interviews focused upon the lack of job security and the related financial concerns.

Table 3 Statements for consideration: Employment insecurity

Items	Statements	Z-score
9	I would like to strongly recommend my job	1.160
10	I am currently interested in and enjoy my job	1.007
15	My company is very meaningful to me	1.161



Items	Statements	Z-score
28	I often think about quitting my present job	1.083
30	I have searched for a new job during the past 12 months	1.196
31	I am concerned about layoffs	1.117
36	I feel anxious about my career path	1.041
37	I feel psychologically uncomfortable	1.049
48	I worry that an additional cost living must be paid	1.070
49	I have to do well management the monetary for the future	1.078

Most participants in this study had from 6 to 10 years of experience as flight attendants. Workers who are experienced and well-trained usually exhibit greater levels of satisfaction in their work, and tend to receive promotions along with higher benefits and financial rewards, which are important consid-

erations in attracting and retaining staff. These staff are still motivated and enjoy their work. However, since the pandemic, many cabin crew contracts have been changed by the airlines, and staff must pass evaluations every year in order to be offered a contract for the subsequent year.

Table 4 Statements for consideration: Job satisfaction and turnover Intention

Items	Statements	Z-score
1	I am enthusiastic about job in this airline	1.440
2	I feel a great sense of personal satisfaction with my line of work in this airline	1.178
3	I am satisfied with my present line of work in this airline	1.586
4	I am happy to have this job in this airline	1.969
5	I think my work fits my aptitude	1.030
30	I have searched for a new job during the past 12 months	1.273
32	I am concerned about layoff	1.255
36	I feel anxious about my career path	1.406

The participants reported concerns about financial plans to meet their own monetary needs, and some are trying to find second jobs. Most of the participants had directly experienced insecurity in their work due to the pandemic, and some had thought about leaving their jobs. Many had suffered from anxiety even though they were still working. The role of flight attendant is considered very attractive in Thailand due to the salary and other

benefits, as well as the social status conferred upon those who hold such positions (Chen and Chen, 2012, p. 41; Kim and Park, 2014, p. 34; Suthatorn and Charoensukmongkol, 2023, p. 347).

Table 5 Statements for consideration: Financial anxiety

Items	Statements	Z-score
2	I feel a great sense of personal satisfaction with my line of work in this airline	1.521
14	I feel happy to spend the rest of my career in this career	1.802
19	I have coordinated my work with coworkers	1.163
23	The conditions of my life are excellent	1.277
32	I am concerned about layoffs	1.759
38	I have developed economic anxiety as a result of salary reduction	1.711
39	I am struggling to reduce my basic living expense due to a salary reduction	1.862
49	I have to do well management the monetary for the future	1.624

Many people in Thailand traditionally wanted to become flight attendants due to the perceived lifestyle and monetary benefits. Accordingly, since the pandemic ended, there are still large numbers of people who wish to become involved in the industry. It is normal for job satisfaction in the industry to match the welfare benefits, so many of the participants

placed emphasis on how well the benefits in their airline compared with others. The current Thai Airways cabin crew reported that their situation was better than before the pandemic when focusing on benefits. Those flight attendants who are satisfied with this situation tend to feel greater commitment to the organization and are happy to focus on their work.

Table 6 Statements for consideration: Job satisfaction and welfare benefits

Items	Statement	Z-score
3	I am satisfied with my present line of work in this airline	1.594
4	I am happy to have this job in this airline	1.272
5	I think my work fits my aptitude	1.914
7	I think my work is valuable	1.957
12	I feel like part of the family at this airline	1.055
30	I have searched for a new job during the past 12 months	1.498
36	I feel anxious about my career path	1.089
43	If the company's welfare benefits are reduced, I am less likely to stay motivated on my job	1.551
51	I think I am losing focus on what I should do to advance my career	1.379

Discussion

The researcher examined various aspects of the research findings, in particular the factors of occupational stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, which participants indicated were of notable importance.

These factors were investigated further using Q-methods, and the researcher investigated the interview records in greater depth. Transcripts were produced to keep a record of the participants' views. A deeper understanding of the participants' opinions can be obtained



through qualitative analysis, examining stress factors, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment after the pandemic. Participants were asked, “what factors contribute to flight attendant job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the post-pandemic period? Your work? What factors contribute to occupational stress in the post-pandemic?” The responses helped the researcher to understand the issues they considered most important. Sample responses from the interviews are reproduced in this paper, to illustrate the perceptions of the cabin crew at international and domestic airlines.

The participants related occupational stress and stress factors to an excessive workload, noting that their duties are onerous and there is a high degree of responsibility involved which makes the work stressful. Insecurity in terms of employment is another concern along with the uncertain career prospects. This insecurity resulting from the pandemic has caused frustration among staff, who are worried about their future careers and also about the financial challenges they face at present. They try to spend wisely because of their fear of an uncertain future, imagining that the role of flight attendant will remain difficult and unstable due to an uncertain economic outlook. The pandemic forced airlines into restructuring their businesses and reducing their costs where possible in order to survive (Suthatorn and Charoensukmongkol, 2022, pp. 347-357). Cabin crew also have an ongoing fear of becoming infected during their work, especially on long-haul flights, despite the improving situation as the pandemic wanes. Shin, et al. (2022, p. 4043) explained the strategies airlines have

implemented to protect crew and passengers from viral infection on board, but it remains the case that transmission has occurred during flights and passengers and crew have become infected with COVID-19, so the concerns of staff are well-founded. The transcripts below outline thoughts on this issue:

“Airline downsizing in terms of staff numbers has resulted in changes to working procedures. For example, the galley and toilets must be cleaned every 30 minutes.”

“Previously, I had a five-year employment contract, but now the company policy has changed and flight attendants are evaluated every year and can only renew the contract year-by-year. I am therefore concerned about the lack of job security.”

“I found that being a flight attendant was not a secure job for me. During the pandemic I was placed on unpaid leave, so I had to spend all my savings just to cover my living expenses.”

“I had a long-term financial plan for the next 5-10 years, but today I have changed my plan to cover only the next 3-6 months because my job is so unstable.”

“After the pandemic, I have changed my spending patterns and think more about my wellbeing. I don’t spend so much on luxury products and instead I focus on my own mental and physical health.”

“Bangkok to London is a long flight, where we work in cramped conditions for more than 12 hours. This increased the risk of catching COVID-19, and the demands of passengers in flight caused additional stress.”

“I feel anxious about the danger of becoming infected with COVID-19 during a flight.”

The respondents reported feeling stress from their financial situation, with cabin crew often affected by enforced leave of absence or reduced rates of pay, sometimes by as much as 50%. Earlier studies have indicated that pay cuts result in higher turnover rates and reduced productivity. In addition, research into the working conditions endured by flight attendants reported notable stress factors such as critical incidents in flight, as well as physical issues such as noise, vibration, long hours, and confined working spaces (Uhuegho, et al., 2020, p. 93; Thayer, 2003, p. 10). Meanwhile, it has been observed that cabin crew spend long periods away from home, with changes to eating and sleeping patterns, they deal with troublesome passengers, work in a pressurized cabin with recycled air, and must remain vigilant and calm at all times when they are working (Chen and Chen, 2012, p. 41).

The participants saw their roles as both valuable and meaningful, and they were generally satisfied with their work in the aviation sector and took pride in their positions. Furthermore, they stated that international flights allowed them to visit interesting destinations all over the world, which they greatly appreciated. While their jobs allowed them to earn enough to buy luxury goods or prestigious experiences, they noted that they also faced the health risks from working in the air. The participants claimed they had a good quality of life, and also received benefits from the airline which would be extended to family members of working. They had become used to earning a good income and therefore felt motivated to continue working in their current roles to maintain their standard of living until their contracts ended or they reached retirement. Research in the hotel sector had pre-

viously confirmed that salary and other welfare benefits played an important role in ensuring job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Sung, et al., 2019, p. 34).

“From my perspective, working for an airline as cabin crew is important as it gives me spending power and a better quality of life. I believe that being a flight attendant is still a popular career choice for the new generation after the pandemic.”

“I have been a flight attendant for 10 years, and I am still motivated and enjoy my work. I have good evaluations each year as I work hard and uphold the company image to serve passengers. I wanted to become a flight attendant since I was a child.”

“I have applied to a large number of international and domestic airlines in the last five years, but kept failing in the final stage, but I didn’t give up. Eventually I got an opportunity with one of the well-known Middle Eastern airlines so I have relocated to that country. Now I am working mainly on the royal flight and I am very satisfied.”

“My educational background is a degree in Airline Business Management, so I doubt I will work in a different industry. I have gained a lot of experience in cabin services and hospitality so I expect I will work as a flight attendant until I retire.”

“The pandemic caused the cancellation of all of our flights, so my salary was cut along with the welfare benefits. I was placed on unpaid leave so I found work as a financial consultant. However, I soon realized that this work was not a good fit for me, so I looked for work again as a flight attendant. Eventually I found a job with an American airline.”



“Now that flights are operating again after the pandemic, I have a chance to start flying again. I’m surprised to see that the salaries and benefits have improved and are much better than before the pandemic. I am very satisfied to be working as a flight attendant with this airline.”

On the basis of these comments, job satisfaction and commitment were the motivating factors to work as cabin crew. Most of the participants have been working for a long time as flight attendants and prefer to continue in those roles. They often felt that they were a part of the airline family, which created a sense of pride and a willingness to deliver excellent customer service when working on board to look after the safety and wellbeing of passengers. It can thus be inferred that job satisfaction and organization commitment are closely associated with working performance. Following the pandemic, cabin crew are perceived by passengers to be the public face of the airlines. They must interact professionally and diplomatically and ensure that passengers are safe and satisfied. To deliver high quality service in the aircraft cabin requires an experienced and stable team, and it is necessary to deliver such service if airlines are to perform well against their rivals, projecting the right image, acquiring a greater market share, and boosting the reputation of the airline (Chen, et al., 2023, p. 95).

Conclusion and Implications

Cabin crew can be considered as front-line employees who act as the face of their employer in the eyes of the public. They have direct contact with passengers and the emotional demands placed upon cabin crew are

therefore significant. In addition to these regular pressures, the problems caused by flight suspensions due to COVID-19 and the associated loss of income created further stress for employees. Now that the pandemic is over, it is important to understand how employees perceive the various potential stress factors they encounter in their work, since this can affect their ability to perform their duties, and will have an inevitable impact upon job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The current study made use of a snowball sampling technique to obtain a sample group of 29 flight attendants employed by domestic and international airlines. The perceptions of the participants were determined via a mixed methods approach which investigated stress factors, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, since the literature identified these areas as significant topics for concern, along with the issues of personal wellbeing, lack of job security, working performance, and risk of COVID-19 infection.

The findings showed the stress factors experienced by flight attendants, but confirmed that they may not want to make a career change in the post-pandemic era because they need the income from their work in order to balance their expenses. They face financial concerns due to an uncertain economic future and they are also worried about their future careers. Having already experienced layoffs within the industry during the pandemic, many flight attendants have suffered from anxiety and depression (Lao-voravit, et al., 2021, p. 30). Furthermore, they face emotional stress associated with dealing with passengers, some of who are difficult or confrontational. In addition, there is the poten-

tial to become infected with COVID-19 in the course of the work, and potentially bringing the virus home to infect family members (Chen, et al., 2023, p. 95). The lack of job security they perceive within the aviation industry is another cause of stress, and this can have adverse consequences both for their work performance and thus the airline, and also for their own personal health (Maneenop and Kotcharin, 2020, pp. 1-2; Al-Aly, Xie and Boew, 2021, p. 259; Chen, et al., 2023, p. 95). Factors which can lead to higher rates of staff turnover will in turn cause losses to the airline and affect its image and perceptions of the brand. It is therefore important to take steps to ensure flight attendants are protected from the virus, and have positive feelings towards the airline so that they are less inclined to leave their jobs during this post-pandemic phase.

The influence of job satisfaction and organizational commitment upon the behavior of staff is well understood (Chen, 2006, p. 274; Song, et al., 2014, p. 455; Yurcu and Akinci, 2017, p. 57), and this is reflected in the idea of social exchange theory, whereby staff will 'reward' the provision of job satisfaction with positive behavior and commitment to the organization (Garba, et al., 2018, pp. 1-8; Wong, et al., 2021, p. 8). The findings in this study differ from earlier research in certain areas, however, where job satisfaction and organizational commitment had a negative relationship with turnover intention (Kim, et al., 2020, p. 633; Shin, et al., 2022, pp. 3-5). It was found in this study that flight attendants in the current economic climate were unwilling to leave the job they had to seek better opportunities, since they doubted that they would easily be successful. Therefore,

even if they were currently not satisfied, they did not particularly intend to leave. The work of Wong, et al. (2021, p. 7) showed that in the hotel sector, staff were reluctant to leave their jobs due to the uncertain economic situation following the pandemic. Furthermore, Marinakou (2022, pp. 5-6) examined the impact of the pandemic upon cabin crew job satisfaction and revealed that most of the people she interviewed were satisfied in their current airline roles and had no intention of leaving the industry after the pandemic. It was also reported that flight attendants tend to be quite resilient when facing challenging circumstances (Marinakou, 2022, pp. 5-6); they were often able to develop through adversity and turn difficult situations into new opportunities.

Practical Implications

The results in this research have some important implications from an academic perspective. The principal stress factors for cabin crew in the post-pandemic era have been identified, confirming that the perception of job insecurity can have significant adverse consequences for airlines as this factor is linked to declining job performance. COVID-19 has had the effect of causing employees to fear for their future, and this lack of job security has had an adverse effect upon their work (Standing, 2021, as cited in Han, et al., 2022, p. 9; Han, et al., 2022, pp. 2-3). Many flight attendants who do not feel confident in their employment prospects have looked for additional work to supplement their income and to feel more secure. When workers experience job insecurity, it is stressful and can feel dehumanizing (Coffey, et al., 2021, p. 1337). The existence of a second job can ease their worried, providing an element of security and an



improved standard of living (Standing, 2021, as cited in Han, et al., 2022, p. 9). Accordingly, Han et al. (2022, pp. 2-3) argued that airlines might be wise to investigate employee insecurity through interviewing staff, and subsequently implementing measures to address the problem and alleviate their employees' fears. One further issue, however, is the fear of infection with COVID-19, and it is important to understand cabin crew members' perceptions of the risk they face in carrying out their duties, since this will affect the decisions made by those flight attendants and can also explain their behaviors. It was suggested by Han, et al. (2021, p. 460) that if employees' fear of contracting the virus could be reduced through measures taken to offer protection, this would lead to staff having a stronger feeling of commitment toward the company. This would represent an effective airline management strategy.

Maintaining good levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the post-pandemic era requires emphasis on health and safety, employment security, positive working relationships, and supportive human resources policies. Job satisfaction is critical in its influence upon organizational behavior (Bakotic and Babic, 2013, p. 4), so the employees' feelings about the employer can lead them to behave positively or negatively, depending upon their level of satisfaction. Similarly, Lee, et al., (2013, p. 406) discovered that satisfied employees

tend to place greater emphasis upon delivering customer satisfaction, to the benefit of their employers, while Marinakou (2022, pp. 1-3) advised that management staff should find the time to meet employees to discuss their concerns and listen to their ideas and suggestions, since this will also improve organizational commitment and job satisfaction. It can be advantageous to ask cabin crew what kind of schedule they prefer, so that the airline's requirements can be met but the crew may achieve a better work-life balance. This flexibility may lead to more positive working relationships and perceptions of company human resources guidelines. Technology is available now which can support employees in scheduling, which would allow them to create their own working patterns to fit their needs.

One drawback to the current study is that it has focused narrowly upon only a small number of flight attendants, and therefore it may not be possible to generalize the findings to a much wider population. The fact that the different airlines involved have different policies and offer different levels of employee support and working conditions may also lead to differences in employee perceptions. Further research is therefore necessary, in particular to assess the effects of airline policies as perceived by different nationalities, working for different airlines, and with comparisons drawn to other sub-sectors within the hospitality industry.

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