

UNRULY PASSENGERS

Original idea from Aviation Security International

Unruly passenger behavior continues to be one of the biggest issues facing airlines and the severity of the problem continues to increase. Although much has been said about dealing with these cases there has been little reference to the causes. Sarah-Jane Prew, the publisher of "*Cabin Safety Update*" examines some of the factors involved and talks about how cabin crew can identify at an early stage when all is not right.

A few of the most recent examples of unruly behavior include a woman passenger who knifed a flight attendant in the neck because that crew member was trying to get the passenger's daughter, a young girl, to sit down and strap herself in for landing. Another incident involved 60 Italian passengers on-board a UK registered aircraft at Gatwick Airport who began screaming and shouting at the crew because a mechanical fault had delayed their flight. So threatening were the passengers that the UK Police had to escort the crew away from the aircraft; the flight was then cancelled.

Two more incidents involve alcohol. On a European flight, a woman who had had only two drinks went berserk and began attacking crew members around her. It was later discovered that she had taken drugs prior to the flight and the mix with alcohol was enough to set her off. Another case was very similar; a woman began attacking cabin crew and threatening fellow passengers after she, and her two companions, were refused any more alcohol. The passenger began screaming and kicking and had to be restrained. It transpired that both she and her companions were US forces personnel on their way to drug and alcohol rehabilitation! In another case, a female flight attendant was sexually assaulted by a male passenger as she tried to serve his meal. In a now infamous case a senior company executive has been prosecuted for defecating on a food trolley.

All these cases illustrate the increasing need to do something about unruly passengers. Not only are incidents like this unpleasant for the crew and fellow passengers but they are also potentially dangerous. The threat of injury is obvious; the underlying threat is in the amount of attention needed to watch one passenger, with the risk of turning valuable attention away from other aspects of passenger safety.

Dealing with the passengers and punishing them after the event is one thing; the industry's aim has to be to prevent these incidents from occurring in the first place and the only way to do this is to try to understand why passengers are unruly.



Experts have come up with several possible causal factors, including the stresses associated with the flying process, drugs and alcohol, the portrayal of the cabin crew as sexual objects and the psychological and physiological effects that flying can have on the human body and mind.

THE STRESS OF AIR TRAVEL

Just look at the processes through which the passenger has to go before boarding an aircraft. Imagine a passenger is late in getting to the airport because of heavy traffic congestion and an inadequate road system. He then takes some time parking the car before heading for the check-in area. The queues at check-in are ridiculously long, made worse by the fact that not all check-in desks are -manned. There are people in the queue, in front of our passenger, who are checking in for a flight that leaves later. The check-in is slow and then, when our passenger finally reaches the desk, there is a problem with the ticket.

Finally, our passenger is checked in and proceeds through security to air side. The queues through security are equally long and no-one seems to understand that our passenger is now running out of time to catch his flight. There are six x-ray machines but, again, only two are being manned. The stress levels are building up.

Finally, reaching the gate, there is a problem with seat allocation and our passenger finds that the seat he booked has now been allocated to someone else. The pre-flight process from Hell? It may sound extreme but the author flies often enough to know that this is not so far from the mark. It only takes a person with the wrong disposition and you have a potentially very fraught and upset passenger on your aircraft. Maybe, then, it only takes one other small incident, such as a departure delay or a problem with carry-on space and the passenger lashes out, metaphorically or even literally.

The abusive situation that follows is then the passenger's fault - but the events leading up to the outburst were beyond his control. He was merely the victim of the traumas of the pre-flight process. Of course this does not excuse bad behavior but if the industry really wants to curb such unruly behavior inside the cabin, it cannot put its head in the sand when it comes to causal factors such as this, however "unreasonable" it feels the passenger is being. The world that we live in today is fraught with stress and the average person's stress levels are ordinarily higher than they would have been 30 years ago. The industry must look at soothing this problem, not aggravating it.

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Another reason for unruly behavior, and perhaps the easiest to understand, is alcohol and drugs. While those under the influence of alcohol are supposedly not allowed on board flights in the first place, it is difficult for a cabin crew member to assess the level of the passenger's inebriation. With drugs it is even harder. In fact, it is often impossible to detect that a passenger is on drugs and yet it can take only one or two drinks to put them over the edge.

Once a passenger shows signs of excess inebriation, or signs of unruly behavior due to drink, it is easy for the cabin crew to refuse any more alcohol. This alone though can spark the very trouble that you want to avoid. Telling a drunk person that they are drunk and that they will not be served any more alcohol is like a red rag to a bull. A UK Judge criticized the airlines earlier this year for making drink so readily available to passengers. This was during the sentencing of an unruly passenger on board a Virgin Atlantic Airways flight. It has to be remembered too that altitude can seriously enhance the effects of alcohol and that the adult passenger can show physical impairment at a blood alcohol concentration of only 0.04%. Therefore an intoxicated passenger can present definite safety risks on-board an aircraft especially if there is an emergency.

On the round alcohol alone is responsible for over 50% of all crimes and for over 90% of sexual violence. This figure can only be exacerbated in the confines of the aircraft cabin at altitude.

THE IMAGE OF SEX

Many incidents on board aircraft have been sexual in nature; either actual sexual assaults or unpleasant sexual harassment. The reasons for these types of assault are numerous and often include alcohol but also has a big impact.

Historically, airlines have advertised their flights by using the lure of sexual attractiveness. Advertisements such as *"I'll fly you like you've never been flown before"* do not go far in enhancing the image of cabin crew as safety professionals.

Although the marketing is not as blatant today, the image of the cabin crew as professional crew members is still not coming across. Indeed, most marketing departments do not see cabin crew as anything other than meal servers. Many airlines dress their female cabin crew in uniforms that enhance their sexuality. Certain airlines in the Far East admit to only hiring attractive female crew members and to firing them once they exceed a certain age or weight. In many parts of the world, women are still fighting for, but not getting, equal rights in the airline industry. This attitude can only filter down to the passengers and the female cabin crew member is seen as an "air hostess" rather than a professional safety warden. Combine this in built attitude with one drink too many, or holiday high spirits, and the possibility of sexual harassment, or even assault, is a very real one.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL & PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF FLYING

Many experts have taken the reasons for unruly passenger behavior one step further, explaining this phenomenon in medical terms. Much of this research relates to health in the air but can also be used to explain how flying in confined spaces can effect the human mind & body.

This whole argument looks at the argument that flying is seen by some as threatening and that it is this reaction to fear and stress that triggers various behavioral patterns, some of which are unruly, in passengers. To understand the fear, think about the scenario of flying. The passenger is effectively surrendering all control at the doorway to the aircraft. They then become little less than animals while on board, not able to do much more than sit or sleep and are reliant on others for their safety, their well being and their food. Many suffer from a form of claustrophobia, being trapped, as they see it, in a metal tube that travels at half the speed of a bullet, high up in the sky. As well as not understanding the theory of flight, these people have a deeper fear of lack of control linked to something that they do not understand.

Although this may sound extreme and as such will relate to only a few passengers, the medical effects of such fears can be manifest in much milder ways in far more people than would at first seem apparent. One psychologist explains that it is the stress of a potentially unpleasant situation that can trigger behavioral consequences and that these consequences vary in severity depending on whether this unpleasant situation is seen as potentially threatening.

- The Situation
- Stress Perception
- Emotional Arousal
- Physiological Arousal
- Consequences

The consequences vary according to the situation, the perception of the situation and the psychological make up of the person involved. The variables include the level of anxiety felt, the level of neuroticism experienced by the individual, the tolerance for ambiguity and their behavioral pattern. Often, in order to tolerate such a threatening situation, the passenger will take to drink as a form of escapism. This can only compound the consequences of any feelings and behavior experienced.

Whereas some people may react with quiet fear, or may show signs of ill health when subjected to flying - a phenomenon that they do not understand and one that they find threatening, others may lash out through that fear and may become aggressive. A medical expert explains that passengers who suffer in this way can suffer from an increased risk of developing medical stresses associated with flying, such as hypoxia which in some can cause a personality change. It must be stressed that different people will react differently to these same stimuli and so in some it may manifest itself in a medical condition, while in others it could show in difficult behavior.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS

When dealing with unruly passengers and defining diffusion techniques, it is first imperative to understand what may lead to further aggression and how to recognize the signs of this. This article has already covered some of the possible reasons for unruly behavior. The trigger factors are the next important factor to understand.

These trigger factors are associated with the passenger who experiences any of the situations described above, and who could become aggressive after just one more prompt. These factors could include the use of statutory behavior, lengthy waiting times (for check-in, boarding, drinks, food, or anything else that can increase impatience), the absence of alternative options so that the passenger feels even less in control, the invasion of personal space, major life changes, lack of inhibition through drink and drugs, provocative words and actions, psychotic interpretation of normal behavior, group oppression and a perceived reward for violence, i.e. those who are accustomed to getting their own way through the threat of violence.

Once the trigger factors are understood, the airlines can work some way towards ensuring that these are not an issue. It is important that the crew are able to recognize the warning signs in a potentially abusive passenger.

There are different categories of passenger behavior, ranging from the compliant, where the passenger does exactly what is required of him or her, through to the unprovoked attack. Between these two extremes come stages of defiance and resistance, from the silent stare, the verbal protest or gesture and the refusal to do what is asked of them. Next comes the physical stage which could range from a passenger using force in reaction to crew members who are trying to control him, to the passenger who attacks unprovoked.

The warning signs of approaching aggression can be seen by looking at a person's body language and facial expression. Posture, gestures and facial expression can all give clues as to someone's state of mind. For example, a body turned away in defiance, a clenched fist or expressions of stress or anger can indicate how a person is feeling.

Careful observation of how the person changes, in stature, color and gesture can also give clues as to what they are going to do next.

It is important that cabin crew have some idea of what to look for in the potential unruly passenger, and what some of the casual factors are so that they are not taken completely by surprise when a passenger becomes difficult.

While it is important for the cabin crew to understand these issues, because they are the ones who have to deal with the problem on-board, it is even more important for the airline management to understand the causal factors of disruptive behavior if they are to have any hope of preventing it in the future. An airline cannot hope to solve a problem without knowing what caused it in the first place. It is not enough, any more, for airlines to support their crews once they have suffered an incident. The carriers have now got to go one step further and look at stopping this from being a problem in the future.

AIR RAGE

- If Heinz-Dieter Kallbach looks into the mirror, he looks into a face with dark stains and scratches. I have bruises over the whole body, swellings at the jaw and also several cracked ribs ", the 59-year old says. Traces of a fight, in which the pilot of the German airline *Germania* got involved last week while overflying Spain. The trauma lasted six infinitely long minutes in the vacation-plane LT 1407 that was on the way from Tenerife to Berlin . After having penetrated into the cockpit and shouted something like, "Spanish Mafia on board ", the 38-years old Oliver W. kicked with all his strength against the face and body of the pilot again and again. With his feet, he aimed also at the column that held the Boeing 737 at 10000-meter. The autopilot disconnected, and only using all his strength ; the Copilot was able to hold the thrust of the engines. The Jet with its 143 Passengers sank suddenly 1000 meters. It could have been worse Kallbach says, the plane could have flipped over. KALLBACH, already in 1957 NVA-Pilot and from 1964 pilot with " Interflug " returned quickly to the routine. The airlines want, like most of all to withhold the incidents. Only few airlines publish numbers over, unruly passengers " like Sky-Rambos in the industry are called. However neutral experts have no doubt: "These behaviors with aggressive passengers on board of aircrafts have increased in the last years ", says the Braunschweiger Luftfahrt-Bundesamt (LBA).
- Passenger Mr. Finneran, a banker, was fined \$50,000 by United Airlines after he assaulted an attendant and then defecated on a first-class food cart during a Buenos Aires-to-New York flight. United said the \$50,000 was to clean up the plane.
- Passenger Mr. Guzman-Hernandez removed his pants and then "simulated having sex with the back of his own seat."
- Passenger Mr. Misiak put his hands around the throat of a flight attendant and threatened her because she spilled a drink on him.
- A passenger named Ms. Pennix grabbed a flight attendant's finger and bent it backward. Pennix explained to authorities that she didn't like the way the flight attendant told her to put her tray and seat in an upright position before landing.
- Passenger Mrs. Levy grabbed a flight attendant by the arms and twisted her wrists. Levy was travelling with three children and explains that she lost her temper because her 20-month-old was crying, had wet pants, and there was no way to get to the bathroom.
- In December 1998, an unruly passenger was aboard a *Malev* flight between Bangkok and Budapest. The crew and passengers tied the unruly man to his seat, then a doctor on board injected him with a tranquillizer. The passenger died--tied to his seat with airplane headset cords! Once the crew noticed that the unruly passenger had died, the plane made an unscheduled stop in Istanbul. Five witnesses (passengers) were detained by the Turkish police along with the doctor. After a 13-hour delay, the remaining 183 passengers winged away (and behaved themselves, in spite of their late arrivals and missed connections). An autopsy in Istanbul showed that the unruly passenger had died due to the mixture in his blood of the tranquilizer and some other drug or alcohol.
- A pilot was forced to circle above Manchester for half an hour yesterday while his crew restrained a female passenger who allegedly headbutted a stewardess and later broke out of a lavatory where she is understood to have been detained in handcuffs. A 26-year-old woman was arrested after the alleged incident on an *Airtours International* flight carrying 360 passengers overnight from Orlando to Manchester. The plane, an Airbus A330, was over the Atlantic when the woman, who was travelling with her nine-year-old son, another woman and a teenager, allegedly became disruptive. Passengers described how she had complained about a crying baby and demanded earplugs before trying to light a cigarette in a lavatory. When stewardesses tried to stop her smoking she had to be tackled by cabin crew and two passengers, restrained with plastic handcuffs – part of a standard issue Civil Aviation Authority restraint kit – and held in the cubicle. As the pilot was preparing to land, the woman, from Withington, Manchester, broke out of the toilet, causing a second fracas that delayed the landing. Vanessa Martinez, 28, the stewardess who was allegedly head-butted, was treated for facial injuries at *Wythenshaw Hospital*, Manchester. Chief Inspector Gill Mellor, of Manchester airport police, said: "Initially the aircraft was out over the Atlantic and the captain had to take the decision whether to return to Orlando or continue. On approach to landing, because of the woman's behaviour, a lot of passengers were up out of their seats and [he] was forced to abandon his initial attempts to land, circling to give the crew time to restrain her again." Eric Davey, 50, from Lancashire, who was sitting in front of the woman, said: "It was even worse when we thought we would have to divert to Shannon Airport in southern Ireland or Reykjavik."