

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA,
FACULTY OF SPORT
LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

VARIOUS LIFESTYLE FACTORS OF FLIGHT CREW MEMBERS

MARTA BON, MAJA PORI, TANJA KAJTNA

ABSTRACT

The main aim of the research was to analyze certain lifestyle factors of flight crew members. This profession has rather high demands relating to body type, basic skills, as well as good mental and physical condition. The sample of respondents included 76 members of the Adria Airways d. d. cabin crew (19.7% men and 80.3% women) with the average age of 30.3 years ($SD = 9.88$), most of them (74.1%) finished high school and only one third had a full-time work contract. Using a questionnaire, we investigated the amount of exercise they get during work and in their free time, as well as their health conditions. Results show that in their free time most of the respondents participate in sports, with outdoor sports being the most popular form of exercise (running and walking, hiking, skiing, and swimming). The respondents spend most of their time at work standing up (18.4%) and walking (27.6%). Many of them (35%) find that they have to maintain postures that are uncomfortable. Most of them experience a combination of all the above. Most (38.2%) do sports at least twice a week, and as many as 84.2% 3 to 5 times a week. Only 4% of the respondents participate in sports activities organized by their employer. Most (77.6%) believe themselves to be in good health and only 6.6% believe themselves to be often under stress. Relatively many smoke. Among health problems, the highest percentage (46.1%) of respondents list fatigue, followed by back pain (34.2%) and neck pain (30.3%). Considering the characteristics of this profession, we recommend cabin crew members do aerobic exercise as well as more complex and preventative sport exercises intended to prevent back pain, and also to do more exercises for strength, core stability and flexibility.

Keywords: lifestyle, cabin crew members, sport exercises

INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle can be defined as a particular way individuals lead their lives defined by a group of distinct behaviors which occur regularly in a certain time period. In the literature,

lifestyle is most often described as beneficial/healthy and detrimental/unhealthy (Solterhed, Ejlertsson and Apitzsch, 2005; Aarnio, Winter, Kujala and Kaprio, 2002; Craig et al., 2003). Broader physical, social, environmental, economic and cultural factors that influence and condition the decisions of individuals, groups and communities are often more important than family factors. The type of work and the work environment are two of the most defining lifestyle factors. We spend as much as a third of our lives at work, thus promotion of good health in the workplace is a common interest of employers and employees (Stergar, 2005). Professions performed in special conditions, such as on an airplane, usually have specific demands. To be able to perform the tasks required of this profession, candidates, in addition to other demands, have to fulfill special health criteria (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, nr. 72/02, 62/08, and 7/09; Regulations on Cabin Crew Licensing in Farčnik, 2012) and obtain a special medical certificate (MC). Because of work requirements they have to stay in good physical condition. The staff has to watch their diet (possible food poisoning) and of course get enough rest. Thus this is a group of people that absolutely needs to take care of their health and physical condition.

The Slovenian airline Adria Airways (AA) was founded in 1961 and has rich experience in charter and scheduled flights and provides good connections around the world (Adria Airways, 2012). They employ people of a variety of professions, among them cabin crew members. Since 2008, when there were 183 cabin crew members (Lah, 2009), this number has decreased due to cost cutting. New members are employed more as an exception and only under strict terms of reference, such as:

- the candidates have to be between 20 and 24 years of age, good-looking and gracious, and have to be of appropriate height (women from 160 to 175 cm, and men between 179 and 185 cm) and weight,
- they need to be physically and mentally able to perform the job,
- they have to fulfill requirements to move in a constricted area.

In addition to the aforementioned, the cabin crew has to take annual medical exams before an authorized medical committee. This job is performed standing up, in small work spaces and usually on a special schedule (nights, Sundays, holidays), and strain is variable and hard to predict. Work is usually connected with staying abroad and therefore with changes in climate and geographic conditions. Constant physical and mental condition is a job requirement. The cabin crew also faces numerous hazards and risks of injury. They are particularly exposed to (Lah, 2009):

- significantly increased physical effort,
- noise: sound intensity between 97 and 117 dB,
- vibrations: frequencies between 1.6 and 80 Hz,
- radiation,
- dirt and the risk of viral infection due to an unfavorable microclimate (low humidity, large temperature differences); drafts during boarding and disembarking,
- risk of work accidents: burns, bruises, physical assaults by passengers, terrorist attacks and airplane crashes.

Because the cabin crew has direct contact with passengers, they need to be polite and helpful at all times. Above all, they are expected to be emotionally and mentally stable

and be in control of stressful situations even in possibly extremely stressful or even chaotic circumstances.

To reach and preserve an optimum level of all health aspects, numerous actions are needed, such as exercise, a healthy diet, stress relief, building and maintaining healthy relationships, balance between work and rest (Tierweiler and Butler, 2001). These activities are seven components of lifestyle (Anspaugh, Hamrick and Rosato, 2003) as defined as a particular way individuals lead their lives. In the second half of the 20th century, interest in lifestyle or certain safety factors and health hazard factors grew, especially because of the connection that was discovered between chronic non-contagious diseases and unfavorable lifestyle (Škof, 2010). The physical aspect of lifestyle, with exercise as its main component, is particularly important due to many positive effects it has on health (Hettler, 2007). Researchers mention positive effects of exercise on health, not only in that it prevents or limits disease progression, but also that it improves one's physical condition, muscle strength and quality of life (Petersen and Saltin, 2006). Researchers and experts emphasize that prolonged sitting and lack of exercise lead to muscle fatigue, causing bad posture and over a longer time period also leading to spinal deformations (Avikainen, Rezasoltani and Kuhanen, 1999; Kosinac, 1992; Nissinen, Hielovaara, Seitamo and Pussa, 2000).

According to Bilban (2005), in 1969 the World Health Organization dedicated the World Health Day to "Work, health and productivity", and its main messages were: 1) A healthy employee at a well-organized workplace is the most productive employee. 2) Health, work and productivity are the most important factors of economic development and social progress. 3) In the international world, levels of life security, health and work capacity are used to assess the position of the working class in a particular society. Berčič and Dodič Fikfak (2008) emphasize that discoveries in ergonomics show the need to facilitate models of exercise and sports activities at workplace and elsewhere (they suggest small parks in the vicinity of companies) and that exercise should be a constituent part of the "culture of exercise/sports", work and management.

PURPOSE

The main goal of this research was to determine various lifestyle factors of cabin crew members by studying how they spend their free time, how much exercise they get and how much stress they believe themselves to be exposed to. Cabin crew members also reviewed their state of health.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents

The research included 76 employees, 15 men and 61 women, between the ages of 20 and 55. The average age was 30.3 years (SD = 9.88). The results show that most (75.9%) finished a four-year high-school, 9.4% a vocational college and 14.7%

a university program. In terms of work contracts, 5.3% of respondents have a contract for a specified period of time, 35.5% are full-time employees, 2.3% work part-time and almost two thirds are student employees, i.e. as many as 56.9% of employees are students no older than 27 years of age.

Tools and implementation

Research was performed with the help of a survey that included 35 variables. The questionnaire comprised of two sections. The first section was intended for gathering data on socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, height, weight, education and work-contract) and the second section was intended for a review of their exercise habits and state of health, i.e. information about lifestyle.

The respondents were informed that the survey was performed for research purposes and that it was anonymous. The statistical analysis of the data was done with the program SPSS 15 for Windows. The acquired data is presented below in greater detail with descriptive statistics and graphs.

RESULTS

Quality of life

The respondents spend most of their time at work standing up (18.4%) and walking (27.6%). Many of them (35%) find that they have to maintain postures that are uncomfortable.

Mostly the job is a combination of all of the above. Everyone answered the question *How many workdays over the last week did you spend walking?* and as many as 84.2% responded 3 to 5 days.

All employees work in shifts. 70.7% are satisfied with their work, 25.3% are partially satisfied and 4% are dissatisfied.

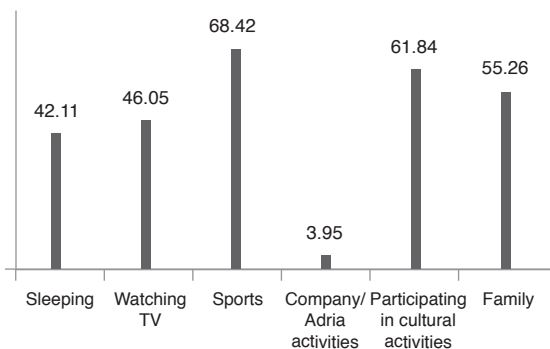


Figure 1. Free-time activities (in %)

Exercise

The main part of the study focused on researching exercise activities as a particular aspect of lifestyle. The research was performed in three sections: the way work is performed/ stress at the workplace, frequency of exercise and the type of exercise.

1. How do you spend your free time (choose all that apply)

Results show that 42.1% of individuals spend their free time sleeping, 46.1% watch television, 68.4% do sports, 61.8% participate in cultural activities and 55.3% spend their free time with their families.

2. How often do you do sports or work out?

Almost 38.2% of all respondents do sports 2 to 3 times a week. 17.1% of respondents are active every day. Thus, considering the recommended amount of exercise, more than half of the respondents are very active (every day) or moderately active (up to 3 times a week). Relatively many work out once a week (23.7%) or less (21%). 3.9% of respondents do sports only once a month.

The most common free-time activity among employees is sports.

The acquired data show that more than 33% of employees work out up to twice a week and that most (38.2%) respondents do sports 2 to 3 times a week.

3. Three of the most popular sports activities (from the most popular, to the second and third most popular)

The graph shows the percentage of individuals per sports activity.

Adria Airways employees take part in various sports activities, and outdoor activities are the most common – as many as 53.9% of all respondents prefer walking, 36.8% running, 26.3% cycling and 22.4% rollerblading. 17.1% of respondents go hiking and

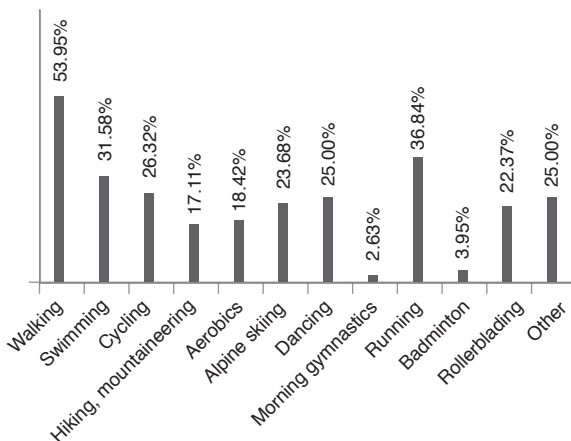


Figure 2. Most popular sports activities (in %)

mountaineering. Two popular sports among the interviewees are also swimming with 31.6% of respondents and dancing with 25%. 18.4% of the respondents do aerobics. Among winter sports, alpine skiing is a quite common activity chosen by 23.7%. A small percentage (3.9%) of respondents play badminton. Morning gymnastics is not that popular either, as only 2.6% chose this activity. 25% of all respondents also listed other sports.

As many as 26.3% of respondents do not go on walks in their free time and as many as 57.9% of respondents do not go for a walk even once a week. 21.1% of respondents spend 2 hours a day walking, and 5.3% walk for two hours a week. 17.1% of respondents spend an hour of their free time walking and 2.6% walk for an hour a week. A particularly high percentage, 10.5% of respondents, spends 3 hours a day walking and 2.6% walk between 30 and 40 minutes a day. 7.9% of respondents spend 10 hours a week walking in their free time.

6. How many days over the last week did you do intensive workouts (aerobics, running, fast cycling, fast running)?

As many as 40.8% of respondents answered that they did not do intensive workouts. Over the last week, 21.1% of all respondents spent 1 hour of their time for such an activity, 14.5% spent two hours and 7.9% spent as many as 3 or 4 hours. 5.3% spent 5 days a week doing such activities and 2.6% did this every day, i.e. 7 days a week.

7. How much time per day did you spend doing intensive workouts (aerobics, running, fast cycling, fast swimming)?

Almost half (46.1%) of all Adria Airways employees did not do any intensive workouts at all. A large share of respondents (31.6%) spent 1 hour of their free time doing intensive workouts and one tenth (10.5%) spent 2 hours a day doing intensive workouts.

State of health estimate

All state of health variables are shown by frequencies and percentages for both genders together.

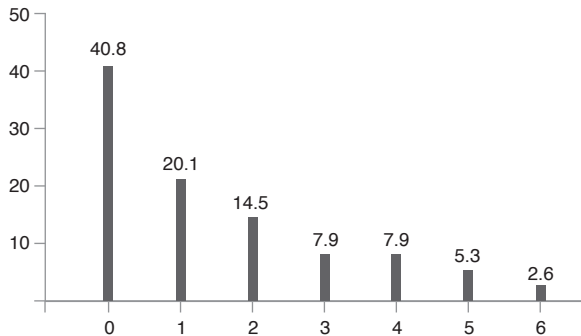


Figure 3. Intensive workouts

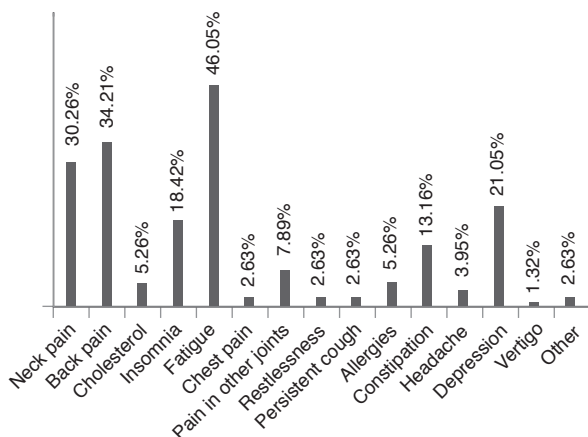


Figure 4. Types of ailments

Most respondents believe their health to be excellent (18.7%) or good (77.6%), whereas 2.6% of employees believe their health to be poor.

When comparing their health to other people of the same age, most think they are as healthy (39.5%) or healthier (42.5%), and only a minority (5.3%) thinks they are much more unhealthy than other people of the same age.

Types of ailments or health problems

As many as 46.1% of Adria Airways employees mention fatigue, followed by back pain (34.2%) and neck pain (30.3%). Respondents also suffer from headaches (21.1%), insomnia (18.4%) and various allergies (13.2%). Among other ailments mentioned by the respondents, the highest number of people (7.9%) have pains in various joints, and the lowest number of people suffer from depression (1.3%).

Stress exposure estimate

Two thirds of respondents (61.8%) are occasionally under stress, and a little less than a third of respondents (30.3%) are under stress very rarely. Only 5 out of all respondents (6.6%) believe themselves to be often under stress.

Smoking and alcohol consumption

Most respondents (65.8%) consider themselves nonsmokers, though 13.2% smoke occasionally. 3.9% of all respondents have been smoking for 10 years. Among individuals who have quit smoking, as many as 89.5% of them still did not smoke even one year later. 1.3% of respondents smoked 1, 2, 3, 6, 8 or 20 years. Two respondents have been smoking more than 15 years.

As many as 87.8% of all Adria Airways employees occasionally consume alcohol, whereas 5.4% never drink and 6.8% drink regularly.

52.7% of respondents never take pain medication, and 47.3% take it occasionally.

DISCUSSION

The work of the cabin crew is very specific. The job is performed under special conditions (humidity, fluctuating air pressure, flight altitude at around 10,000 meters above sea level). All of this influences the mentality of employees (Pavlič-Kobav, 2001). Cabin crew members are typically women, thus this profession was also included in a large study (Simpson, 2008) that investigated the ratio between genders in typically female professions (in addition to cabin crew members, this included nurses, librarians and teachers).

It is worth comparing the findings of this study with the findings of another study on the subject of free time among nurses and employees of the Slovenian Casino Hit. The research conducted on casino employees (Valentinčič, 2008) found that most respondents (17.4%) prefer to spend their free time with their families, and only 11.2% of respondents prefer to do sports in their free time. A similar discovery was made in a study of a sample of nurses (Mlinar, Karpljuk, Videmšek and Štihec, 2008) who prefer to spend their free time with their families and spend less time doing sports. Cabin crew members are legally (General Health Requirements OPS 1.085, in Farčnik, 2012) obliged to get an average or above average amount of exercise. In order to renew one's permit to work as a cabin crew member which is only valid for one year, one must have a valid medical certificate. Part A (Chapter 6: Crew Health Precautions) of the Operations Manual lists circumstances under which the cabin crew has to "cancel" a flight, see an authorized physician or declare themselves "unfit to fly".

Similarly to the Slovenian average, the most popular sports activity of cabin crew members is walking. If hiking is added to this, as many as 46.4% of adult Slovenians prefer walking. Various studies (Zaletel Kragelj, Fras in Maučec Zakotnik, 2004; Pori in Sila, 2010) confirm the correlation between sports activities and various healthy lifestyle decisions. Studies also confirm that regular daily walks of between 11 and 20 minutes reduce the risk of hypertension by 12% and that walks longer than 20 minutes reduce this risk by 24%. If regular walks are accompanied by any other additional form of exercise performed once a week, the risk of hypertension is reduced by as much as 38%. Because of the positive effects regular exercise has on health, it is important for the health of individuals and society to get regular exercise, which has been confirmed by many researchers (Bilban, 2005; Bilban, 2002; Divjak, Backović Juričan and Janežič, 2008; Knaflič, Svetina Nabergoj and Pahor, 2010; Mišigoj Duraković, 2003). The findings of this research show that more than 33% of employees who exercise are active at least twice a week. The acquired data show that 38.2% of all respondents do sports 2 to 3 times a week. These findings are similar to the results of the HIT Park Casino study (Valentinčič, 2008), where as many as 43% of respondents work out 2 to 3 times a week. This is comparable to modern trends in the increase of the active population in Europe and Slovenia. The research of exercise habits of Slovenians (Sila, 2010) based on the data of a Slovenian public opinion research states that almost all categories that have to do with some kind of sports activity (performed at least once a month or more often) have been significantly more represented than when this research was first conducted 12 years ago.

Findings concerning self-evaluations of stress exposure in the workplace are also insightful. Only 6.6% of the cabin crew members who were surveyed believe to be exposed to stress often, while others believe to be under stress only occasionally, even

though to a layman it may seem that everything connected with performing a job so “high up in the air” must be very stressful. A similar conclusion was made by the authors of a study on stress among managers, which is believed to be one of the most stressful professions with a high degree of responsibility. On average, managers participating in the research find their work moderately stressful or somewhat stressful (Luban-Plozza and Pozzi, 1994). The reason behind these results might be that managers enjoy their jobs and are content with them. In fact, Možina (1998) also finds that specific stressors in the workplace are connected with the fact that the individuals are not performing their jobs that they wish to and cannot become accustomed to their work. Unfortunately, this was not addressed in the present study, but this is quite definitely a topic suitable for further research.

Based on many studies (Anspaugh, Hamrick and Rosato, 2003; Bilban, 2005; Hettler, 2007; Petersen and Saltin, 2006) it was assumed that employees who are more active also consider themselves healthier. Nevertheless, it was discovered that in the sample the connection between these two aspects is weak ($r = 0.173$) and not statistically significant ($p = 0.133$). There are probably several factors that influence such results. The sample was mostly made up of young people who take health somewhat for granted. It is also possible that answers are connected with “Slovenian modesty” and that people do not like to “brag” about excellent health in order to avoid tempting fate. Other factors might also be at work here, or as other authors (Bilban, 2005; Cooper, Dewe and O’Driscoll, 2001) state, psychological aspects should also be considered when studying exercise habits in particular professions.

Several studies researched the connection between proper body and motor development as a counterweight to stress (Powell, Thompson, Caspersen and Kendrick, 1987; Spielberger, 1985; Tušak and Maten, 2008). It was also discovered that people with some more developed motor skills, such as coordination, are personally more stable, less neurotic, less inhibited and less impulsive (Valant Velepec, Pori, Tušak and Pori, 2009).

From the standpoint of sports science, the main conclusion is connected with the intensity, amount and scheduling of exercise routines. It seems that the intensity and the amount of exercise should be increased, especially for preventative reasons and to enrich one’s lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

Cabin crew member is a very specific profession that also has a special influence on the lifestyle of people practicing it. Above all, this article examined the aspects of exercise and sports, the importance of which is clear for a profession with such clear and high demands on the level of physical condition. While findings confirm this, they also provide opportunities for optimizing this part of lifestyle. The findings show that among free-time activities cabin crew members prefer walking and running which, when considering the level of intensity, fall into the group of moderate aerobic work-outs. Because of the nature of this profession, some time should perhaps be intended for (more) intense physical activities that improve physical strength and take care of the musculoskeletal system, i.e. the skeletal muscles, bones and joints. Different types of sports activities have different

effects on the human organism. Thus a balance between exercises is needed to ensure a healthy structure and posture, the functioning of organs, endurance and flexibility. This would reduce the presence of back and neck pain, and stress, as well as improve the general well-being. It must be emphasized that the findings are based on subjective evaluations. For a more objective approach, the respondents' physical abilities would have to be tested.

A look at the findings shows that there is room for improvement in the cooperation between the employer and the employees. Perhaps introducing a family friendly work environment should be considered, as is presented in a study on how successful coordination of professional and familial responsibilities is influenced by several factors originating at the level of individuals and their families as well as on the level of organizations and the state (Knaflič, Svetina, Nabergoj and Pahor, 2010). Adopting a healthy lifestyle on all levels is generally fulfilling or in simpler terms, "provides more effective employees and more satisfied employers" and thus the mission of sports activities achieves its purpose.

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RŮZNÉ FAKTORY ŽIVOTNÍHO STYLU ČLENŮ LETOVÉ POSÁDKY

MARTA BON, MAJA PORI, TANJA KAJTNA

SOUHRN

Hlavním cílem výzkumu bylo analyzovat některé faktory životního stylu členů letových posádek. Tato profese klade vysoké nároky na tělesnou konstituci, základní dovednosti, dobrou psychickou a fyzickou kondici. Vzorek respondentů byl složen ze 76 členů Adria Airways – palubních průvodčích (19,7 % mužů a 80,3 % žen) s věkovým průměrem 30,3 let (SD = 9,88). Většina z nich (74,1 %) dokončila střední školu. Pouze jedna třetina měla pracovní smlouvu na plný úvazek. Pomocí dotazníku byla zjišťována frekvence cvičení, které respondenti provádějí v práci a ve svém volném čase, a jejich zdravotní stav. Výsledky dokumentují, že ve volném čase se většina respondentů účastní sportů v přírodě (běh, chůze, turistika, lyžování, plavání). Většinu času v práci tráví respondenti ve stoje (18,4 %) a při chůzi (27,6 %). Mnoho respondentů (35 %) si uvědomuje, že musí vydržet v pozicích, které jsou nepříjemné. Většina z nich zažívá kombinaci předchozího. Mnozí (38,2 %) sportují alespoň dvakrát týdně, 84,2 % uvádí 3–5krát týdně. Pouze 4 % respondentů se účastní sportovních aktivit

organizovaných zaměstnavatelem. Většina vyšetřovaných (77,6 %) se domnívá, že jsou v dobrém zdravotním stavu, pouze někteří (6,6 %) jsou přesvědčeni, že se často nacházejí pod tlakem. Poměrně mnoho respondentů kouří. Ze zdravotních problémů jsou v nejvyšší míře uváděny únava (46,1 %), bolesti zad (34,2 %) a bolesti krční páteře (30,3 %). S ohledem na charakteristiky této profese doporučujeme palubním průvodčím provádět zejména aerobní cvičení, ale i složitější preventivní pohybová cvičení, jejichž cílem je především prevence bolesti zad. Dále by měli provádět cvičení zaměřená na rozvoj síly a rovněž cvičení orientovaná na základní stabilitu a flexibilitu.

Klíčová slova: životní styl, palubní průvodčí, sportovní cvičení

Marta Bon
marta.bon@fsp.uni-lj.si