

Airlines, airports must do more for stressed-out passengers, study finds

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With the coronavirus crisis dealing the travel industry one of the biggest

blows in its history, a new study from researchers at Florida Atlantic and Florida Gulf Coast universities suggests that airlines and airports should be doing more to help passengers cope with stress.

Airlines and airports need to design services and create [marketing strategies](#) for passengers dealing with stressful leisure travel, according to Ye Zhang, Ph.D., and Melanie Lorenz, Ph.D., both of FAU, and Jase Ramsey, Ph.D., of FGCU.

The study, published in the journal *Tourism Management*, explores the diverse stressors travelers face during leisure trips and how these travelers cope at different stages of their journeys. The findings offer important insights into travelers' needs and challenges, said Lorenz, an assistant professor in the Marketing Department within FAU's College of Business.

"This would go a long way toward increasing revenues for both airlines and airports at one of the most difficult times ever for the [air-travel](#) industry," she said.

Air travel is particularly important to Florida's hospitality sector, the largest private employer in the Sunshine State with more than 1.1 million people working in the industry. Estimates showed that roughly half of those workers were laid off or had hours reduced at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic earlier this spring when it disrupted nearly every aspect of American life. Airlines have been devastated by the crisis, slashing jobs and reducing routes, and desperately need consumers to feel safe enough to return to the skies.

For passengers who struggle with stress management, a personalized stress profile could be generated based on passenger demographics and trip data, Zhang noted. Groups of passengers more sensitive to certain stressors could be identified beforehand to offer assistance and help

prevent the potential of mental health issues associated with air travel—a critical step that could protect other passengers and crew members, she added.

The researchers also concluded it would be wise to send personalized marketing messages tailored to passengers with specific sensitivities to offer encouragement or to provide extra-clear instructions.

"Airlines and airports have rich databases of [passenger](#) information, so they shouldn't waste it and treat passengers as complete strangers," said Zhang, an assistant professor in FAU's Hospitality and Tourism Management program.

In the study, the researchers surveyed nearly 1,100 passengers at the gate in airports in the United States and Brazil. The data was collected prior to the pandemic, but the professors believe it has important implications for new realities such as COVID-19.

The findings show that people with more stressful jobs tend to experience greater stress levels prior to departure and upon return of flight. The pattern persists no matter the adverse event, such as flight delay or cancelation, lost baggage or a terrorism or safety threat.

The study also found that younger people tend to be more sensitive to adverse events at departure, while older travelers were stressed by unpleasant behaviors of other passengers upon return. People who frequently travel are more resilient to adverse events but find social disturbance and dissatisfied air service deliveries less tolerable.

"It can ultimately result in less trust for the air-travel industry as well as reduced travel intentions and loyalty," the study stated. "Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to unveil the mechanisms of air-travel stress to effectively alleviate it and regain customer confidence."

More information: Ye Zhang et al. A Conservation of Resources schema for exploring the influential forces for air-travel stress, *Tourism Management* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104240](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104240)

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