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Work stress among female cabin crew

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Abstract

This paper presents a study carried out on the stress among female cabin crew working in an international airline. The female cabin crew members are of Indian and International origin working with the international airline, a multinational organization in the United Kingdom (UK). The total sample size considered for the study comprises of 100 women. The respondents' age lies in the range of 25 to 50 years belonging to a variety of races. Purposive sampling technique was used in this regard. 'Stress, Strain and coping styles among Airhostesses' scale was used to analyze the factors influencing the stress among female cabin crew. It was found that stress effects are playing an equal role on all the cabin crew independent of the regularity of the feeling. It is also inferred that all of the people feel equally strained independent of the regularity of the feeling. This work gives a fair idea about occupational stress and is useful for working professional to gauge their stress levels.

Keywords: Female cabin crew, work stress, roster, Pre-flight checks

Introduction

The status of women in India has been changing continuously depending on the amount of exposure they get as they grow and as a campaign of equal human rights was initiated by many activists and reformers at the beginning of the modern era, change in the status of women was witnessed. It was observed that the women in India have held high offices. It was then the positions of the President, Prime Minister and many other leadership roles were taken over by Indian women. However, inequality still prevails among a large number of Indian societies. The traditional homemaker's job was replaced by many careers that were earlier dominated by men, out of which, the job of a Flight attendant was taken over by women as one of the career options.

Flight attendants, air hostesses, cabin crew, flight stewardesses or inflight crew are all the names given to the person or a group of people responsible for the safety and security of an aircraft, passengers and each other. Flight attendants on board a flight collectively form a *cabin crew*. The main role of a flight attendant is to ensure passenger safety and other roles include client service duties such as serving meals and drinks. Moreover, emergency services such as rejected take-offs, emergency landings, smoke in the cabin, fires, depressurization, dangerous goods and spills in the cabin, emergency evacuations, hijackings, water landings, and sea, jungle, arctic, and desert survival skills were also part of their job profile.

But as it said, everything comes with a package deal and so with this kind of job profiles, several work-related issues such as job stress, mental health problems and risk factors also came along. Isolation and solitude are experienced by the crew due to inability to maintain regular social relationships at home as well as on the job due to job demands, such as constantly changing crew composition with each flight, resulting in working with new colleagues, could be a huge benefit, but might limit opportunities to develop a steady group of workplace friends for mutual support. It's also believed that the isolation associated with the job may have contributed to the suicides among some colleagues. Work-life balance is another factor which has a very adverse effect on physical health and general well-being. As the flight attendant has all the onus of building relationships with passengers by creating a friendly atmosphere and also by treating passengers with respect and kindness. Passengers may or may not reciprocate to the flight attendant. Hence the flight attendant may use the unaccepted ways to these actions.

Spontaneous reactions of anger or frustration on the part of flight attendants after being treated badly by passengers were not felt to be acceptable forms of corporate behaviour (Ballard, Corradi, Lauria, *et al.*)

Therefore, a study was carried out in this regard to find out the stress among female cabin crew and the various stressors causing stress. The reason to carry out this study was as one of the authors of the paper has worked as a female cabin crew with international airlines and has faced a lot of stress and strain. To find out whether other females working in the same industry also experience a similar kind of stress this study was carried out.

The study was carried out to increase the awareness of the stress involved working in an in-flight environment on women flight attendants that may be useful material for future references and for research scholars who plan further research in the field of human development and aviation. This study could also help employers and other professionals to understand and review the provisions provided.

To analyse the factors influencing the stress among female cabin crew and also to analyse the level of stress among the female cabin crew was the objective of the study.

Method

This study was conducted in an international airline, which is a multinational organization in the United Kingdom. The criteria for selection of the respondents for the study were female cabin crew members working with the international airline. The total sample size comprised of 100 women. Respondents are between the age range of 25 to 50 years and various races and nationalities. Purposive sampling technique was used for collecting the data.

To determine the work stress of female cabin crew, a questionnaire was administered and the responses were duly recorded. ‘Stress, Strain and Coping Styles among Airhostesses’ by Dr Satishchandra Kumar, Jaya Iyengar and

Ashwini Hirlekar (1994)^[6] was used. The data was studied by using Frequency and percentage to understand the demographic characteristics and the level of stress among the female cabin crew. Chi-square test was used for homogeneity of categories. The variables were classified into several classes according to the different levels of response and are represented in the form of a contingency table.

Results and Discussion

The results of the present study “work stress among female cabin crew” who worked with the international airline were statistically analyzed and the findings of the study presented are as follows:

1. Stressors - Factors causing stress in the female cabin crew. The responses by the female cabin crew on the factors causing stress were tabulated and studied to understand the stressors.
2. Level of stress in Female Cabin crew.
 - a. Level of Organizational Stressors among Female Cabin crew members.
 - b. Level of Interpersonal Stressors among Female Cabin crew members.
 - c. Level of Perceptual Stressors among Female Cabin crew members.

Stressors - Factors causing stress in female cabin crew

McGrath (1970)^[10] defined stress as a perceived imbalance between demand and response capacity under conditions where failure to meet demand has important consequences. According to Table 1 below, the respondents have expressed their experience of stress due to the stressors on a four scale rating as always, sometimes, rarely and never. Among all of the total number of respondents 35% of them used “always”, 38% respondents used “sometimes”, 19% of respondents used “rarely”, 8% of the respondents used “never”.

Table 1: Stressors

Stressors	Always	Sometime	Rarely	Never
1. Do you get stressed due to the scheduling and rostering?	0	63	25	12
2. Do you face any anxiety regarding preflight checks?	0	35	48	17
3. Do you get stressed over work load/time pressure/deadlines?	0	85	15	0
4. Do you face any interpersonal problems with other cabin crew/ flight crew?	0	70	23	7
5. Do you feel there is a lack of opportunities and potential advancement?	27	36	20	17
6. Do you feel lack of encouragement and support by the management and superiors?	29	43	21	7
7. Did you experience any kind of harassment by passengers or the crew either sexual/nonsexual such as looking/touching/comments etc during flights?	0	36	46	18
8. Do you find monotonous work involving under utilization of skills?	58	29	10	3
9. Do you experience irregular flight duty timings?	79	18	3	0
10. Do you experience variability in work load and uneven distribution of work?	55	38	5	2
11. Do you experience derogatory public view of your profession?	13	38	26	23
12. Do you think you cannot show your personal problems and sometimes have to give false smile?	100	0	0	0
Total no. Of percentage	35%	38%	19%	8%

Responses by the female cabin crew to the factors causing stress

The responses of the cabin crew for each stressor were recorded as shown in table 1 and Figure 1 as follows:

Scheduling and rostering

63% of the respondents felt stressed sometimes, 25% of them felt stressed rarely and 12% of them never felt stressed. However, 0% of the respondents felt they did not always feel stressed due to their scheduling and rostering of flights.

Anxiety regarding preflight checks

48% of the respondents said they rarely felt anxious, 35% of them said they felt anxious sometimes, 17% of them never felt anxious, however, none of the respondents said that they always faced anxiety regarding preflight checks.

Over workload/time pressure/deadlines

85% of the respondents are stressed sometimes, 15% of the respondents are rarely stressed, therefore none of the respondents are always stressed or never stressed due to over

workload or time pressure or deadlines.

Interpersonal problems with other cabin crew/ flight crew

70% of the respondents said they faced interpersonal problems with other cabin crew/ flight crew, 23% of the respondent said rarely, 7% said never and none of the respondents said they always faced interpersonal problems.

Lack of opportunities and potential advancement-

36% of the respondents said they felt sometimes, 27% of the respondents said they always felt, 20% of them felt rarely and 17% of them never felt there was lack of opportunities and potential advancement.

Lack of encouragement and support by the management and superiors

43% felt some times, 29% of the respondents felt always,21% of the respondents felt rarely and 7%of them said they never felt lack of encouragement and support by management and superiors.

Harassment by passengers or the crew either sexual/non-sexual such as looking / touching/comments etc. during flight

56% of the respondents rarely experienced, 36% of the respondents felt sometimes, 18% of the respondents felt they never experienced any kind of harassment by the passengers or the crew it could be either sexual or non-sexual by looking, touching or commenting. No cabin crew always felt this way.

Monotonous work involving underutilization of skills

58% of the respondents said always, 29% of the respondents said sometimes,10% of the respondents said rarely, 3% said that they never found their work monotonous and involving underutilization of skills.

Irregular flight duty timings

79% of the respondents have said always,18% of them said sometimes, 3% of them have said rarely, and none of them said never as everyone has experienced irregular flight duty timings.

Variability in workload and uneven distribution of work

55% of the respondents said always, 38% of the respondents said sometimes, 5% of the respondents said rarely, 2% of the respondents never experienced variability in workload and uneven distribution of work.

The derogatory public view of your profession

38% of the respondents sometimes experienced derogatory public view of your profession, 26% of them experience it rarely, 23% of them said never and 13% of them said always.

Show your personal problems and sometimes have to give false smile”

Where all the 100% of the respondents have said “always” they cannot show their personal problems and have to give false smile.

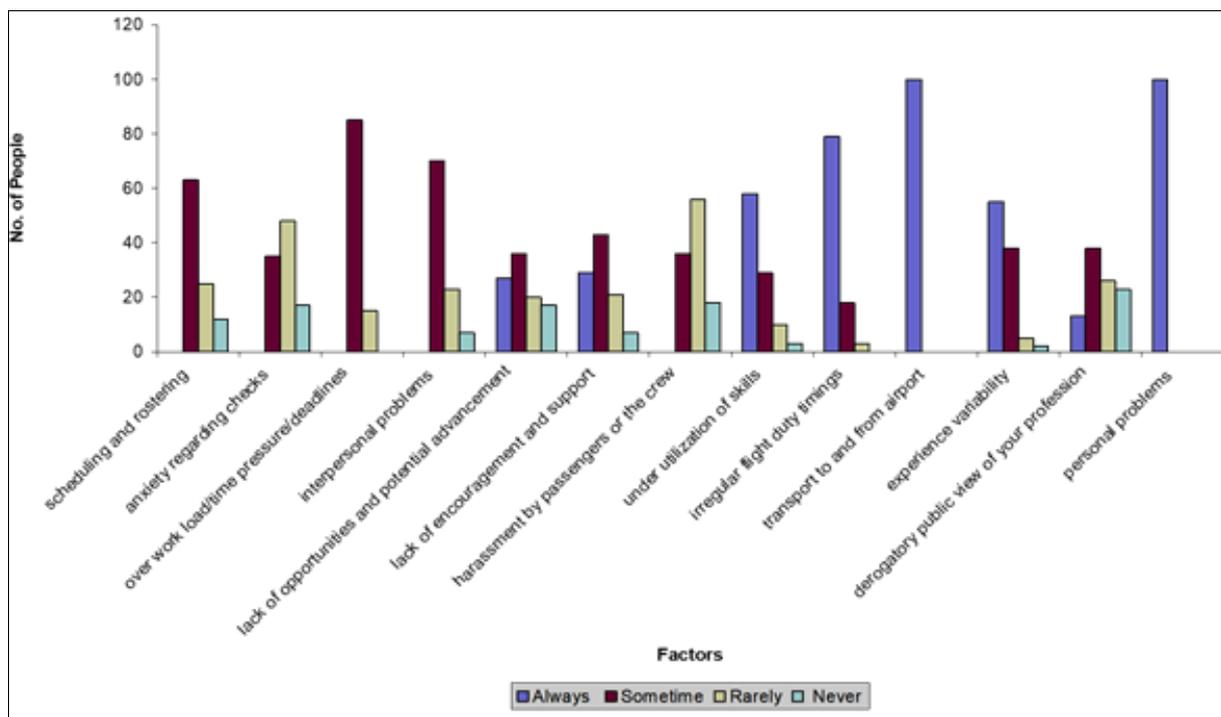


Fig 1: Stresses

Level of stress in Female Cabin crew

a) Level of Organizational Stressors among Female Cabin crew members

The stressors of employment organizations among the female cabin crew were analyzed based on frequency and percentage scores and further used for analysis. The stressors that caused stress ‘always’ for statements which reflected sources of stressors among the selected female cabin crew were considered for the identification of stressors.

Triveni *et al.* (2006) concluded that the major sources of job

stress perceived by 90 veterinary assistant surgeons were numerous meetings, workload, lack of personal growth, lack of facilities and monotonous nature of work.

An assessment of table 2 and figure 2, revealed about the organizational stressors among the female cabin crew. 42% of the cabin crew said “always” and reported that they experienced stress “always” in areas of workload, time, pressure, deadlines, irregular flight duty timings, monotonous work involving underutilization of skills and variability in workload and uneven distribution of work.

However, availability of transport to and from the Airport, during night stops and hotel stays during flights for all the cabin crew did not contribute to their stress as their organization reduced their responsibilities.38% felt stressed “sometimes”, 15% of them rarely got stressed due to organizational stressors.

Only 5% of the cabin crew “never” got stressed due to scheduling and rostering, preflight checks, monotonous work and variability in workload and uneven distribution of work. The chi- square value (544.1254) reveals that there is a significant difference in the organizational stressor on a female cabin crew at 1% level.

Table 2: Organizational Stressors among Female Cabin crew members

Organizational Stressors	Response to Stressors				Significance of Chi-square test for Homogeneity
	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
Due to the scheduling & Rostering	-	63	25	12	544.1254**
Face any anxiety regarding preflight checks	-	35	48	17	
Get stressed over workload/time pressure/deadlines	-	85	15	-	
Monotonous work involving underutilization of skills	58	29	10	3	
Experience irregular flight duty timings	79	18	3	-	
Transport to & from Airport, during night stops & Hotel stay during flights	100	-	-	-	
Experience variability in work load & uneven distribution of work	55	38	5	2	
Total percentage:	42%	38%	15%	5%	

** Significant at 1% level

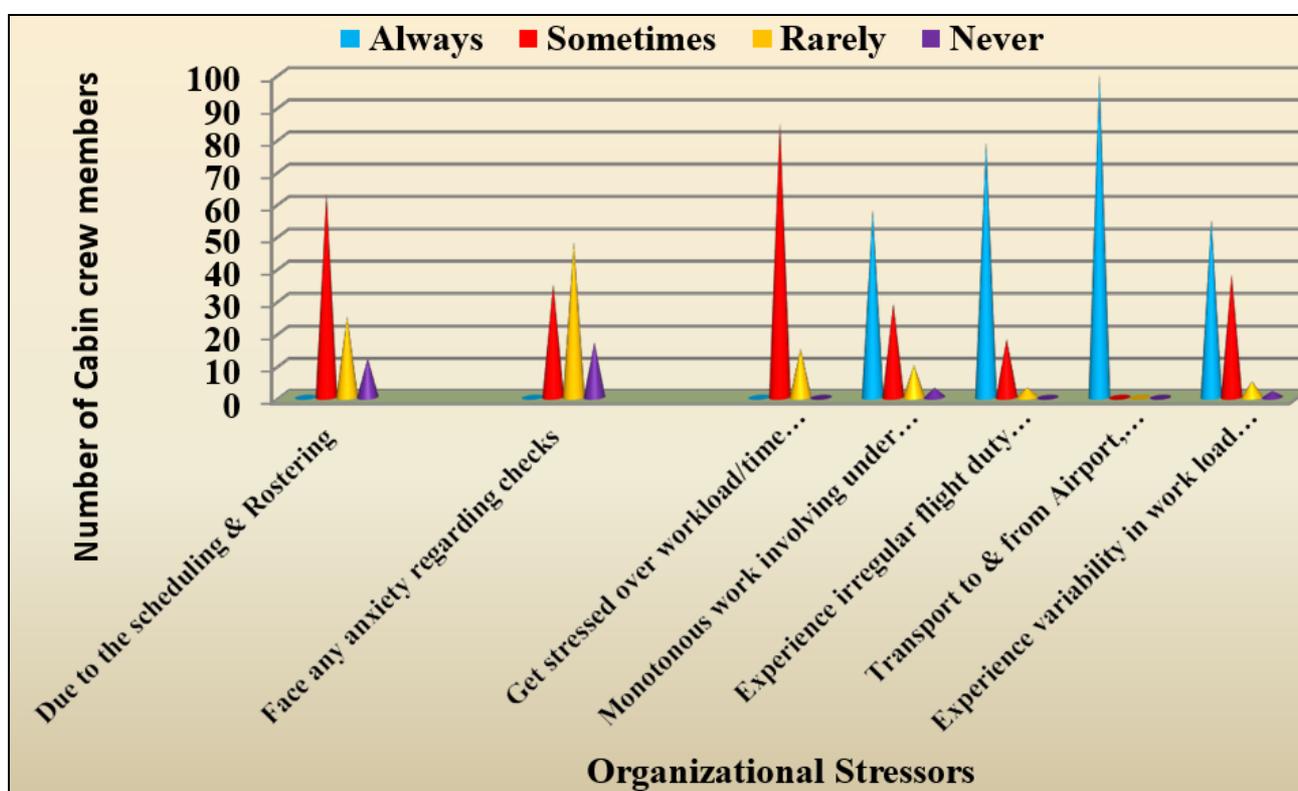


Fig 2: Organizational stressors experienced by female cabin crew members

b) Level of Interpersonal Stressors among Female Cabin crew members

An observation of table 3 and fig.3 about the interpersonal relationship stressors among the female cabin crew revealed that a majority of 45 per cent of the respondents reported that they ‘sometimes’ face interpersonal problems with other Cabin crew/ flight crew, 35 per cent felt they did experience it ‘rarely’,16 per cent did not face any interpersonal problems, such as harassment of any kind be it sexual or non-sexual, involving looking, touching or comments either by passengers or crew, including a derogatory public view of their profession. whereas 4 per cent of the crew felt that they always experienced derogatory public view of their profession. The chi-square value (76.5912) reveals that there is a significant difference of the interpersonal stressor on

female cabin crew at 1% level. A study done on software professionals by Latha and Panchanatham (2007) [7] studied about the work stressors and its implications on the job performance concluded that more than fifty per cent of the software professionals did not feel stressed or strained by the working conditions. But the interpersonal relationship factor was closely related to the stress level experienced by the employees in that organization. The female employees of railways, bank and teaching institution were studied by Pandey and Srivastava (2000). 96 female employees, 16 subjects in each professional area both from nuclear and joint family were taken. The study identified that respondents belonging to the nuclear family had expressed more interpersonal work-related stress.

Table 3: F Interpersonal Stressors among Female Cabin crew members

Inter-personal Stressors	Response to Stressors				Significance of Chi-square test for Homogeneity
	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
Face interpersonal problems with other Cabin crew/ flight crew	-	70	23	7	76.5912**
Experience any kind of harassment by passengers or the crew such as sexual/non- sexual, looking/touching/comments, etc. during flights	-	26	56	18	
Experience a derogatory public view of your profession	13	38	26	23	
Total%	4%	45%	35%	16%	

** Significant at 1% level

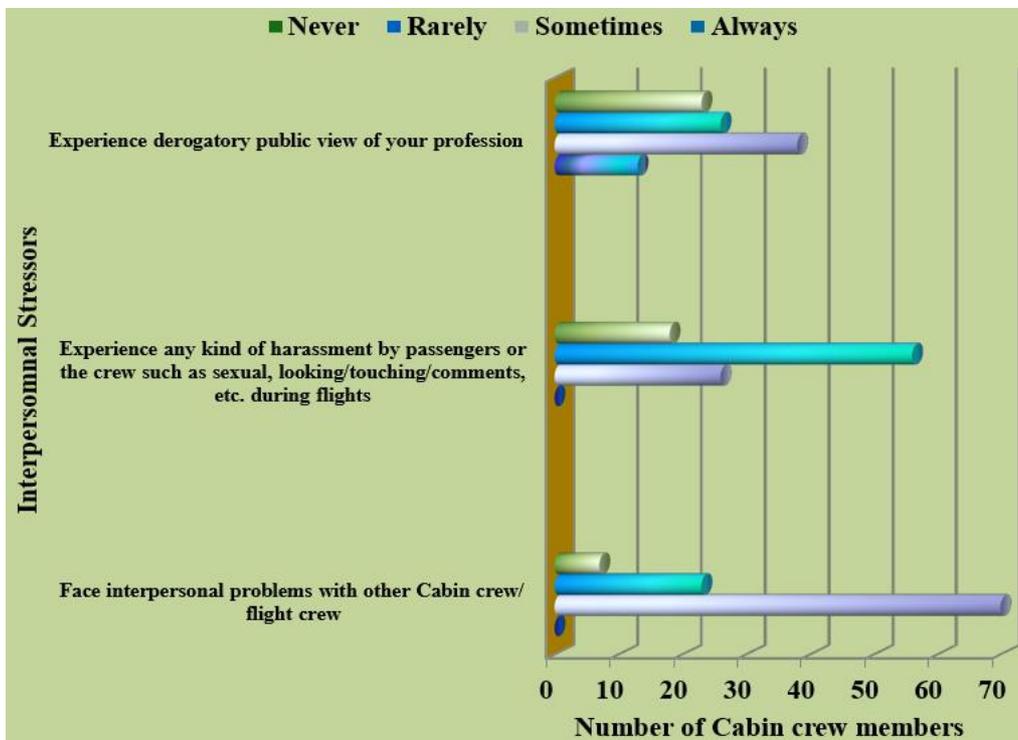


Fig 3: Interpersonal stressors experienced by female cabin crew members

The interpersonal stressors at the workplace influence the employees as studied by Potter *et al.* (2002) [13]. It was also seen that diseases and wellbeing declines may be experienced due to Interpersonal conflicts. According to Ching-Fu Chen, Ya-Ling Kao, Department of Transportation & Communication Management Science, National Cheng Kung University, in a study based on the job demands-resources model in 2010, empirically investigates the relationships among job demands, job resources, burnout, colleague isolation, health problems and job performance for flight attendants. the results show that colleague isolation mediates the relationship between job resources and job performance.

c). Level of Perceptual Stressors among Female Cabin crew members

According to the Table 4 and Figure 4, the perceptual stressors among the cabin crew was significantly high as 52 per cent of the respondents always felt the lack of opportunity, potential advancement, encouragement, support by the management and were moderate to low. Job stressors

were found to have a substantive effect on these outcomes, following adjustment for individual factors. Despite moderate-to-low levels of distress and dissatisfaction, targeted efforts to reduce selected job stressors and to enhance social support may be important steps toward improving the well-being and satisfaction of FAs says MacDonald LA, Deddens JA, Grajewski BA, Whelan EA, Hurrell JJ (2003) [8] in a study to examine the relationships between these job stressors and psychological distress and job dissatisfaction.

Emotional labour can be defined as the degree of manipulation of one’s inner feelings or outward behaviour to display the appropriate emotion in response to display rules or occupational norms. (Kay Hei-Lin Chu, 2002) [5].

On comparing the occupational stress level experienced among the 20 college teachers and 20 executives by Upadhyay and Singh (1999), it was found that the teachers showed significantly higher levels of stress than executives on intrinsic impoverishment and status factors. They experienced stress because their wishes and a strong desire for a better and prosperous career were felt to be blocked by others.

Table 4: Perceptual Stressors among Female Cabin crew members

Perceptual Stressors	Response to Stressors				Significance of Chi square test for Homogeneity
	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
Feel there is a lack of opportunities & potential advancement.	27	36	20	17	145.7321**
Feel lack of encouragement & support by the management & superiors.	29	43	21	7	
Cannot show your personal problems & sometimes have to give false smile.	100	-	-	-	
Total%	52%	26%	27%	19%	

** Significant at 1% level

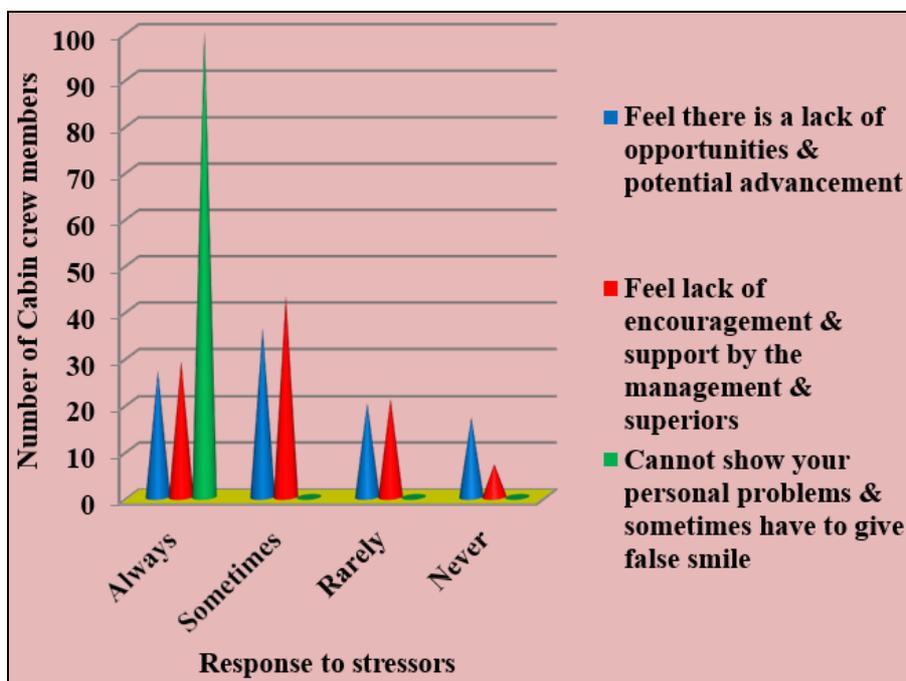


Fig 4: Perceptual stressors expressed by female cabin crew members

Conclusion

The study has revealed the relationship between the demographic characteristics and the various components of organizational stressors. The demographic characteristics significantly influenced the stressors and therefore, it is of prime importance to resolve the female cabin crew's stress by examining the stressors in an organization.

It was also found that there is stress among the flight attendants at various levels and it was found that at one level it was identified as perceived stress and on other levels, it was due to interpersonal relationships. Lack of potential advancement, lack of encouragement by seniors and showing fake smiles were also worrisome for the employees. Derogatory public view also leads to stress among female flight attendants.

The present study is useful to guide employee readers to achieve their goals to satisfy their career by creating awareness about the stressors and levels of stress so that coping styles can be studied for the minimization of stress in their life.

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