

Yet Another Reason Why Flight Attendants Need Better Regulations

By Paige Towers • May 3, 2016 at 12:05pm

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Sure, they hand out headphones, shimmy the drink cart down the aisle and wear nearconstant smiles. But flight attendants are also responsible for passenger well being: it's their duty to administer medical care and assist others in the event of an emergency. But as one recent study suggests, many flight attendants seem to be struggling with sleep difficulties. And it hints at a larger concern scheduling regulations.

The study in question

, commissioned by Ireland's IMPACT Trade Union to investigate cabin crew health and wellbeing of airline Aer Lingus, involved 470 flight attendants and found that roughly onethird of those studied admitted to taking prescription sleep medication once a week. Additionally, approximately 90 percent of subjects reported waking up at least once every night, as well as having trouble sleeping at least once a week.

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Though unsettling, these findings aren't incredibly shocking — the odd schedules, time zone hurdling and general stress a flight attendant's job involves don't exactly prepare someone for sound sleep. The study sounds an alarm about flight attendant regulations and Aer Lingus notes they're taking it very seriously.

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The issue of Flight Attendant Sleep is by no means a singular issue. According to the AFA, flight attendants sometimes only get four to five hours of sleep before working another 14hour duty. That's because their rest period often includes passenger deplaning, preflight preparation and passenger boarding. In other words, they're technically still working when they should be sleeping.

Pilots are required

to have a 10hour minimum rest period prior to flight duty, and eight of those hours must be spent in

uninterrupted sleep. This is an important rule for general safety. Flight attendants, however, have no such requirements.

In March, the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee passed a bill implementing a Fatigue Risk Management Plan (FRMP) which will provide education for flight attendants to recognize when they are too tired, and what they can do in order to achieve proper rest. The vote came after hundreds of flight attendants, representing the Association of Flight AttendantsCWA (AFA), came to Capitol Hill and visited all 541 Congressional offices advocating for their cause.

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It was a victory, but not a complete one: the Senate failed to include language which would require them to have the same 10hour minimum rest period. In a press release

, AFA International President

Sara Nelson said the group will

continue to fight for their fatigue to be taken as seriously as that of pilots.

In any profession, long hours and little sleep build up.

about the issue highlights Julie Bronson, who worked 18 years as a flight attendant for Delta and Northwest Airlines. She was fired after she injured a child in a car crash, which happened two days after she returned from a series of flights to India. She said she was “still on Indian time,” and the drowsiness left her unable to function properly.

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A 2013 article from
the Star Tribune

“These are not just cocktail waitresses, for God’s sakes,” said Jim Oberstar, former chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the article. “If the flight attendant has to get you out of the plane in 90 seconds, they have to be alert, at their top performance, they can’t be run down.”

Tribune