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**The Effects of
Short-Term Repeated Work-Related Separations
on Pilots, Cabin Crew, and Their Partners**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology
at Massey University

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1996**

Abstract

Separations from a spouse or intimate partner due to work are becoming increasingly common in industrialised societies. Previous research has focused on military and long-term work-related separations, mainly examining the reactions of the partners at home. The partners at home have been almost exclusively female and have been in heterosexual relationships. In addition to the gender bias and the focus on the partners at home, there are other limitations to the findings of previous studies. These limitations include the absence of stated hypotheses or theories and the lack of a control group. Results from previous studies on both long-term and short-term work-related separations indicate that the separations have negative effects on both the individuals' health and on their marriages or intimate relationships. The present research examined in the aviation industry the relationship between short-term work-related separations and aspects of physical and mental health. The primary aims of the present study included studying female and male travelling partners (international crew) and partners at home (partners of international crew) who were in heterosexual and same-gender relationships. In addition, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilised, together with a control group of national flight crew and their partners who were not considered to be separated due to their work. The present research consisted of three studies; interviews of international crew which were qualitatively examined (Part 1); and two studies (the crew study and the partner study) using a survey which collected both quantitative and qualitative data (Part 2). In the first part of the research, most international crew reported that work-related separations had some adverse effects on themselves individually and on their relationships. In particular, all crew reported that loneliness was a key factor which they attributed to the separations. From this finding of the widespread reporting of loneliness, a model of the moderating process of loneliness on the relationship between separation and physical and mental health was proposed. This theory was tested in the second part of the research using hierarchical multiple regressions. However, results from the second part of the research failed to support the proposed moderating role of loneliness for either crew or their partners. Although no interaction effect was discovered, loneliness was a significant predictor of all six physical and mental health outcome variables for crew, and three of the outcome variables for partners. In addition, loneliness was claimed to be the most difficult

problem of the work-related separations for both international crew and their partners in the qualitative section of the surveys. By comparing results from international crew and international partners with the control groups of national crew and national partners, the present study concluded that claims of the effects of repeated short-term work-related separations have been exaggerated. There were few differences between those who were separated and those who were not, in terms of aspects of physical and mental health. Those crew who were separated reported higher levels of psychological distress and higher levels of physical health symptoms than crew who were not separated. Partners who were separated were more likely to report lower levels of job satisfaction than partners who were not separated. When crew and partners were compared, international crew reported higher levels of psychological distress, physical health symptoms, and lower levels of job satisfaction than international partners. In addition, international crew reported higher levels of self-rated health. However, these differences could have been a result of the unique working conditions of flight crew, as the analyses comparing national crew with their partners also found similar differences. The findings of the present study were discussed in terms of the implications for further research, including the need to use a control group. Although few differences were found between those who were separated and those who were not, it was acknowledged that some individuals may be more adversely affected by the separations than others. For these individuals, the effects of work-related separations should not be underestimated because of potential health and safety risks. Implications for organisations and individuals for whom work-related separations are part of their employment were discussed including the need to address the issue of loneliness.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisors Professor Nigel Long, Dr Hillary Bennett, and Dr Ross St. George for their advice and encouragement. Thanks also to Dr Fiona Alpass for her help on statistical matters, Dr Carol MacDonald for her expertise on WordPerfect, and Mrs Fiona Paewai for transcribing.

I am grateful to all the crew at Air New Zealand who participated so willingly by completing the questionnaires and talking about their experiences of work-related separations. I would like to thank all the employee representative groups at Air New Zealand for their interest. This project was assisted by a research grant from Air New Zealand and I would like to acknowledge the support of three Human Resources personnel in particular - Mr Terry Arnold, Ms Alison Warren, and Ms Chadryn Stewart.

Finally, I would like to thank Inga, Jacqueline, and Deborah for their love and support.

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Chapter 1

Thesis Overview

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