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ICAO MID SAFETY SUMMIT 2026

Aviation in Times of War

PRESENTED BY

Dr Edma Naddaf





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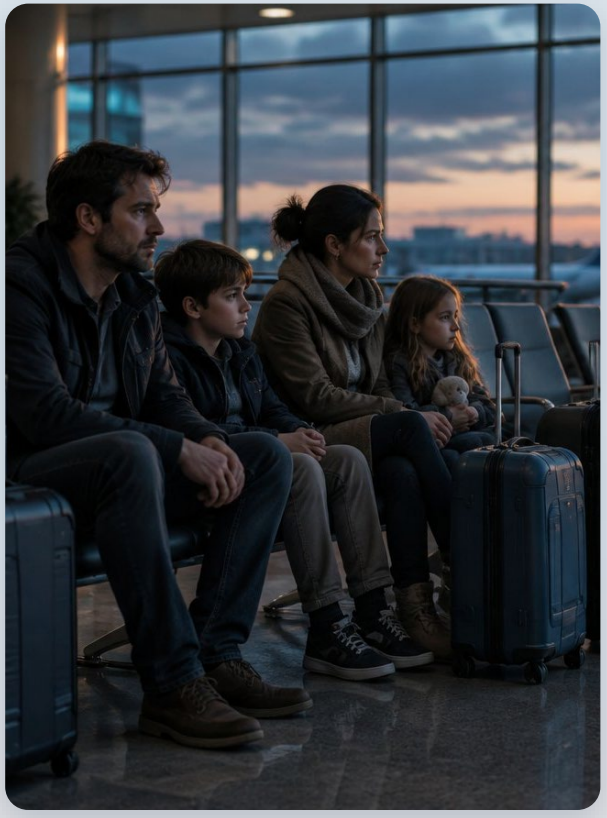
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CONTEXT

Background

War is a sudden and rapidly escalating armed conflict that:

- Disrupts normal life
- Creates immediate uncertainty and threat
- Generates a persistent sense of danger
- Causes significant psychological strain and trauma











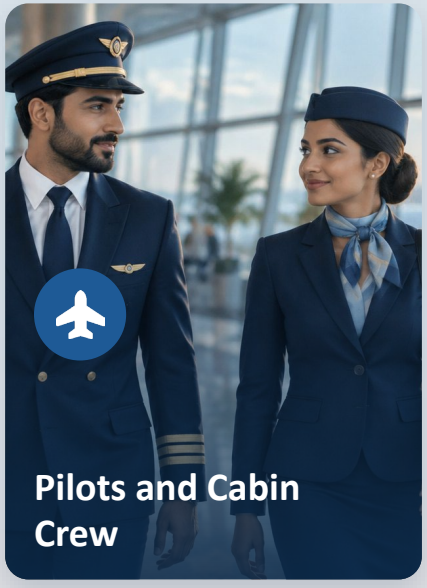
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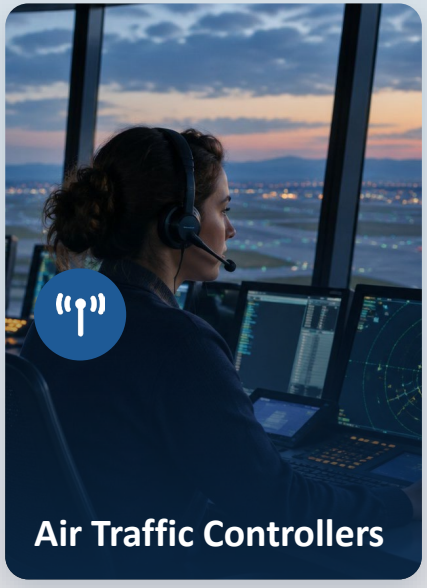
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PEOPLE

Who Is Affected



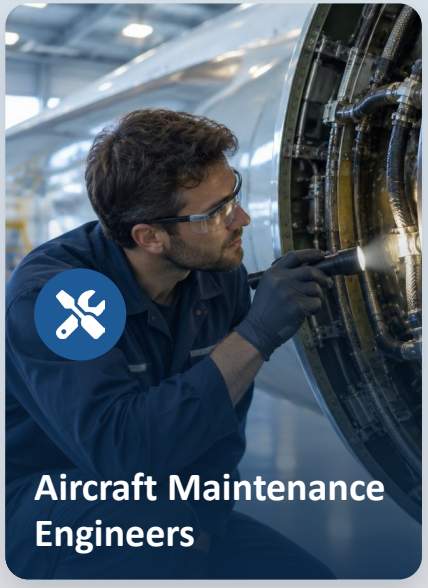
Pilots and Cabin Crew



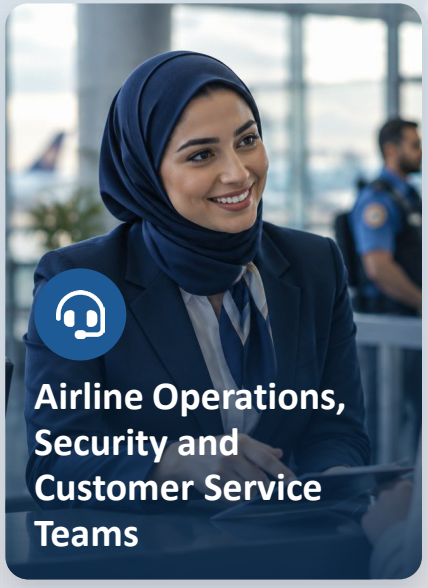
Air Traffic Controllers



Ground Handling and Airport Personnel



Aircraft Maintenance Engineers



Airline Operations, Security and Customer Service Teams





Impact of War



Operational
Impact



Professional
Impact



Psychological
Impact

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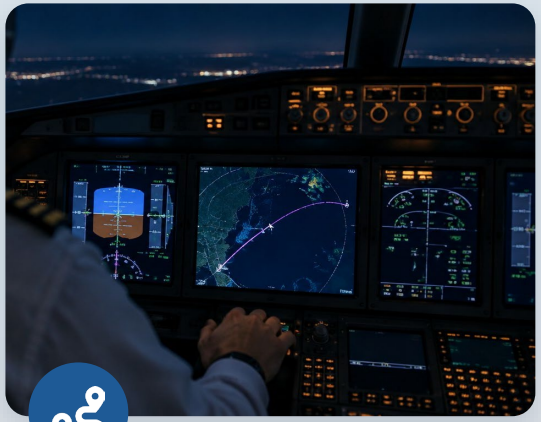
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IMPACT · OPERATIONAL

Operational Impact of War



Airspace closures and flight cancellations



Rerouting, longer duty periods and schedule disruptions



Staff shortages, crew repositioning and fatigue



Changes in operational procedures and safety requirements





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IMPACT · PROFESSIONAL

Professional Impact

01

Relocation, accommodation and transport difficulties

02

Career uncertainty and disruption to professional development

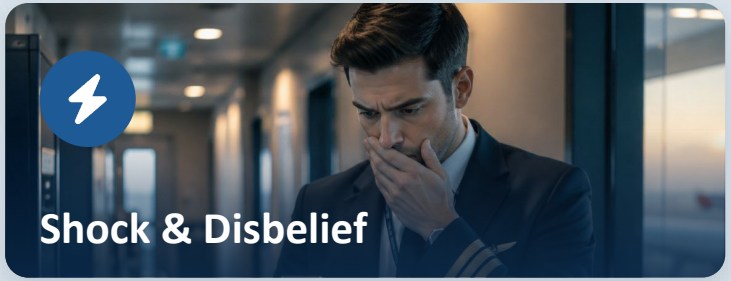
03

Additional workload for staff who remain operational

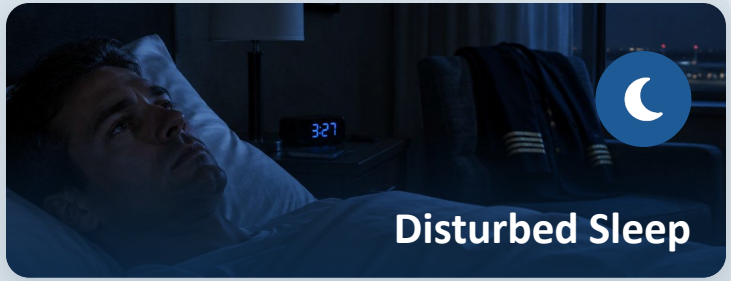




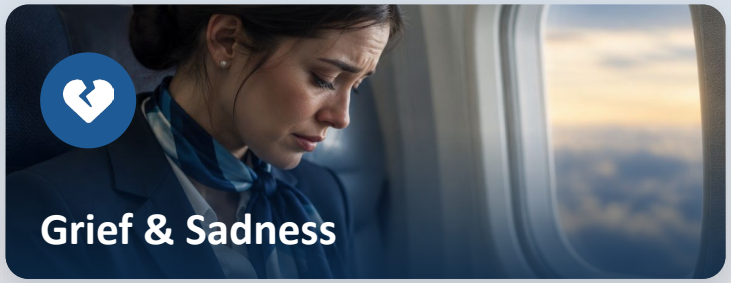
Psychological Impact

















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HUMAN RESPONSE

Different People Have Different Reactions to War Trauma





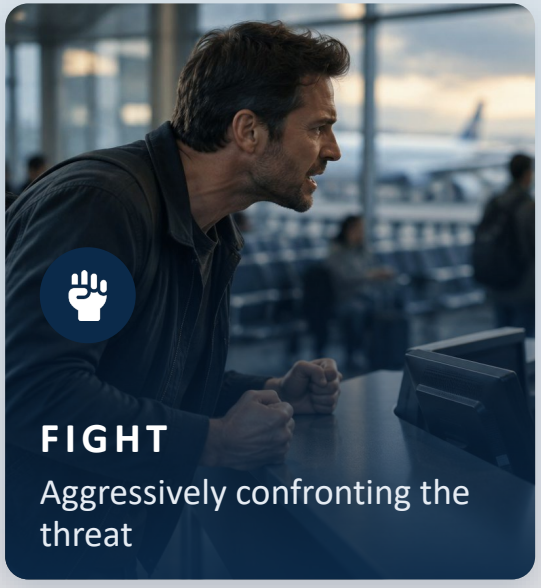
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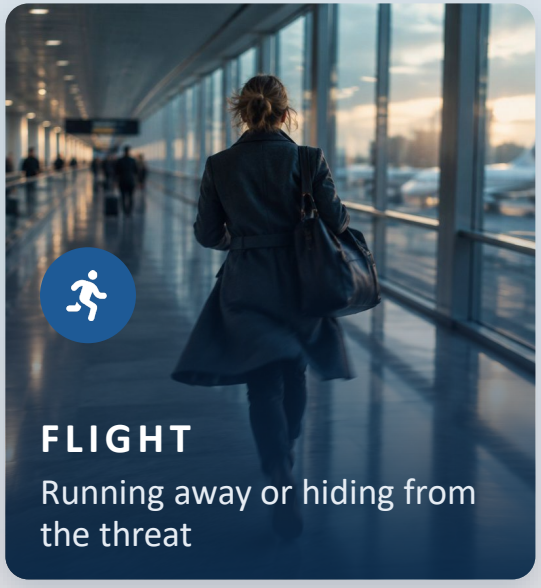
SURVIVAL RESPONSES

Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn



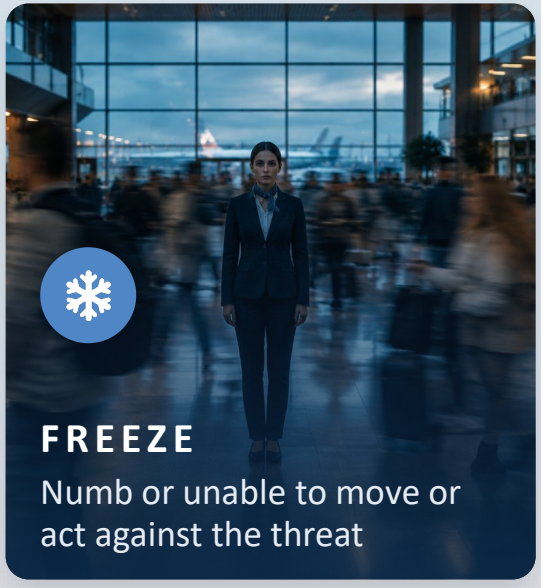
FIGHT

Aggressively confronting the threat



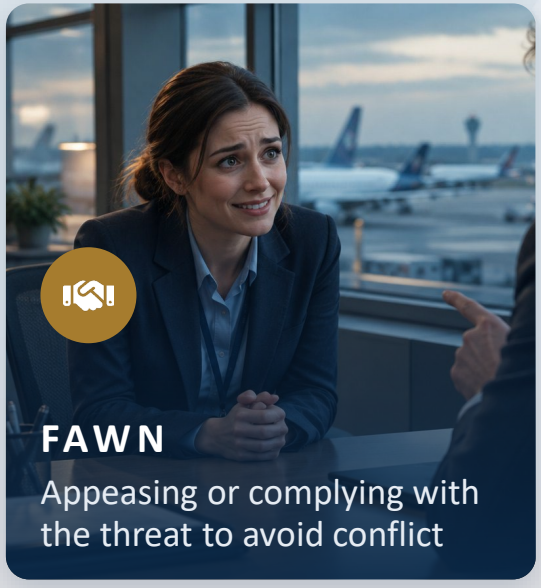
FLIGHT

Running away or hiding from the threat



FREEZE

Numb or unable to move or act against the threat



FAWN

Appeasing or complying with the threat to avoid conflict





Example Reactions

War

PERSON A

A

Acute stress, disorientation and high emotion

PERSON B

B

Fear, hypervigilance and over-processing

PERSON C

C

Withdrawal, emotional numbing and mental freeze

PERSON D

D

Total loss of control and dysfunctional behaviour





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INFLUENCING FACTORS

Factors Influencing Responses to War Trauma





Factors That Shape the Response

- Mental state at the time of trauma
- Duration and frequency of exposure
- Personal loss and displacement
- Previous trauma
- Proximity to danger
- Coping skills
- Family and social support
- Perceived level of threat





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IMPACT OVER TIME

Short-Term and Long-Term Impact of War





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IMPACT OVER TIME · SHORT TERM

Short-Term Impact

- Acute stress reactions (ASR)
- Hypervigilance
- “Brain fog” and tunnel vision
- Short-term memory difficulties
- Sleep disturbance and persistent fatigue
- Behavioural and social disruptions
- Delusions and brief reactive psychosis





IMPACT OVER TIME · LONG TERM

Long-Term Impact

- Emotional exhaustion and detachment
- Avoidance and social withdrawal
- Irritability and relationship difficulties
- Reduced work performance, engagement and resilience
- Difficulty “switching off” even when the threat has passed
- Permanent cognitive decline
- Psychological disorders
- Psychosomatic disease risks





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SUPPORTING STAFF

What Can Airlines Do to Support Their Staff?

01 Maintain clear, honest and regular communication

02 Provide staff with accessible, complementary psychological care

03 Be ready to provide flexible rostering when needed

04 Acknowledge and factor in fatigue as a risk to operations

05 Be able to activate emergency planning and staff evacuation arrangements when necessary





CONCLUSION

Key Takeaways

> *There is no single ‘normal’ response to an abnormal event.*

01 **War affects both operational safety and the people responsible for it.** Its impact extends to professional functioning and emotional wellbeing.

02 **The same threat can produce different reactions.** Personal history, perceived safety and available support influence each person’s response.

03 **Visible behaviour does not reveal the full psychological impact.** A calm appearance may conceal distress, while an emotional response does not indicate weakness.

04 **Psychological effects can emerge at different times.** Some appear immediately, while others develop later or persist long after exposure.

05 **Airline support needs to continue beyond the immediate crisis.** Recognising individual needs and allowing for recovery are important parts of supporting staff.





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Thank You

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