

What the KQ is – and why it matters to society

1. Should airlines offer treatment programmes to passengers with aerophobia?
2. 1 in 6 people are estimated to have a fear of flying
3. Often people have a poor understanding of risk and danger.
4. Gigenrenzer estimated that there were an additional 1595 car accident fatalities after the 9/11 airplane attacks on the Twin Towers in New York
5. Because of fear of terrorism and hijacking people in the US chose to drive rather than fly. This is despite the statistical fact that you are much more likely to die in a car accident than in a plane.
6. Fear of flying impacts society economically, socially and emotionally.
7. Aerophobia receives a lot of attention because air travel is a crucial part of modern society.
8. Fear of flying can have an impact on business people, as well as holidaymakers and those wishing to visit friends and family.
9. EasyJet and Virgin Atlantic both offer short courses designed to help passengers overcome their fear of flying – but it is unclear how effective these are.

Using Psychological research, theories, ideas to explain the KQ

1. CC explains acquiring a fear of flying through associating a neutral stimulus with a fear response. The fear might be triggered by turbulence on a flight, and then flying itself (the NS) becomes a CS that triggers the fear.
2. Fear of flying can be acquired through OC. If a person who has a small fear of flying repeatedly avoids the anxiety by always travelling by an alternative method, then the fear is negatively reinforced and can eventually lead to a phobia.
3. SLT explains fear of flying through observational learning. If a child sees a parent react with fear or anxiety on a flight this might lead to the behaviour being copied and vicariously reinforced through ARRM.
4. Fear of flying can be treated through systematic desensitisation – gradually overcoming the fear by working through a hierarchy of fear and learning to fully relax at each stage. Capafons et al. (1998) found that SD was an effective treatment for fear of flying.
5. EasyJet and Virgin Atlantic both offer short courses designed to help passengers overcome their fear of flying. These use techniques such as brief SD, relaxation exercises and giving factual information about flying (e.g. accident statistics).
6. Airlines have claimed a 92-98% success rate on their courses. These courses use SD and reciprocal inhibition techniques, as well as cognitive methods (challenging negative thought processes linked to flying).
7. Fear of flying courses have been criticised for being both expensive and only available in larger cities. They may also lack rigorous evaluation as they are not independent but sponsored by the airlines or airports.
8. An alternative treatment to those offered by airlines is virtual reality exposure therapy. Rather than an actual airplane experience, clients go through a 3-D virtual flight. Rothbaum et al. (2000) found that VRE therapy was as effective as the standard techniques. 6 months after therapy 93% of both the VRE and standard therapy clients had flown. VRE is potentially a less expensive and more accessible treatment than those offered by airlines.