

# **Business Travel and Emotional Support Study - Australasia**



# EFFECTS OF BUSINESS TRAVEL

## Dealing with the complexity of business travel or life abroad can impact your mobile workforce's health and well-being.

Life as a mobile worker can bring unforeseen stress and strain. When on a business trip or deployed in a foreign country, people may be exposed to unexpected situations, minor or severe. Distance from loved ones, new environments or a serious accident can all trigger stress and anxiety.

At a time when the International Labour Organisation (ILO) considers work-related stress as a "21st-century disease", emotional support is often considered to be the missing

link in a comprehensive Travel Risk Mitigation program.

The Business Travel and Emotional Support Survey is an International SOS study that surveyed workers and people responsible for the health, safety and well-being of their company's mobile workers.

The survey findings represent the responses from nearly 100 of Australia and New Zealand's leading organisations.\*

### Top five stress factors mobile workforces are most exposed to

Travelling through time zones -'jet lag'



Lack of work-life balance or work overload

Poor sleep and diet



Isolation, disconnected from personal/ work support or being far away from home for a period of time

Organisational structure and climate



### Consequences of business travel<sup>1</sup>



- Physiological: jetlag, deep-vein thrombosis, poor eating and drinking patterns, less exercise
- Social: loss of family role, reduced time for home-based social life, emotional upset, imbalance domestic responsibility
- Psychological and emotional: isolation, psychological and mental health disorders, inbox overload, sensory overload shock

\* Data in this whitepaper, unless otherwise stated, comes from this study.

# WHAT HAPPENS TO TRAVELLERS

“When discussing negative effects of travel, jetlag is commonly raised as a ‘safe’ topic for discussion. However, research shows there are other factors that may impact the mental health of travellers, including issues arising from unforgiving workloads or being far away from loved ones. Mobile workers experience a variety of stressors added to their normal work pressure that could be proactively addressed by organisations,” said Dr Jo Holdaway, Medical Director of Mental Health at International SOS.

## PHYSIOLOGICAL FACTORS:

- › Fewer opportunities for physical exercise
- › Worse eating habits than when at home
- › Sometimes the over-consumption of alcohol
- › Jetlag, which affects sleep-wake patterns
- › 1 in 10 travellers on long-haul flights develop symptomless deep-vein thrombosis<sup>1</sup>

## Effects of sleep

Poor sleep is both a warning sign of and a risk factor for deteriorating mental health. It is associated with many mental health disorders, particularly anxiety and depression. Poor sleep for travellers may occur for a variety of reasons including travel across time zones, lengthy flights, work stress, the need to work extended hours to catch up on emails, or worry about things happening at home.

Some studies report a majority of travellers who experience mental health issues whilst travelling suffer from poor sleep, which is a significant risk factor for deteriorating mental health if not addressed. In a study of 1,340 young travellers to tropical countries in 2000, reported in the Journal of Travel Medicine, Potasman et al found that 11% reported neuropsychiatric problems. Of those who responded to the subsequent questionnaire, 52% reported sleep disturbance.

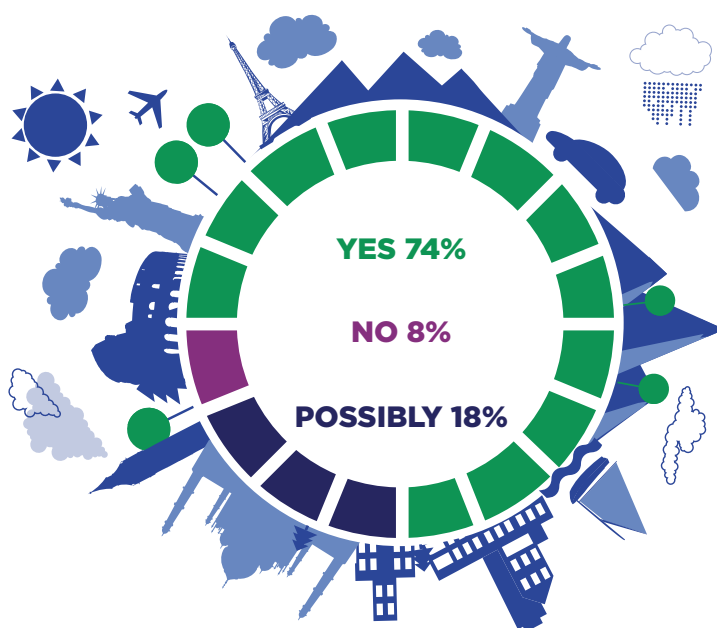
## SOCIAL EFFECTS OF TRAVEL

Frequent travel not only has physical consequences but social as well. Consistent time away from home could increase an imbalance of domestic responsibility with the non-travelling parent. Time away inadvertently means the traveller will often miss key family milestones and events, which could also have a negative impact on children's behaviours due to the emotional upset of having a parent frequently away for extended periods. Along with family stress, chronic business travel can affect the traveller's social life as they have limited time at home which might force them to focus on family and only close friends.<sup>1</sup>

## GLOBALLY CONNECTED

Consistent connectivity to family and friends can alleviate some of the negative effects associated with prolonged and consistent absence.

74% of organisations have a process in place to ensure a continuation of communications and connectivity (e.g. global roaming data, Wi-Fi, IT support)



# SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

“Recent Australian and New Zealand Work Health & Safety legislation, reflects the rising importance of emotional support on the corporate Duty of Care agenda. Companies want to take care of their employees and are realising this also includes emotional and mental health, especially for their mobile travellers who face environments that exacerbate stress-inducing factors. It is important for organisations to start putting stronger pre-departure risk management

procedures in place to help employees manage workplace stress,” said Sally Napper, Security Director of Australasia.

According to World Psychiatry, the most vulnerable travellers are patients with mental disorders<sup>2</sup>. Forty-five percent of Australians will have some kind of mental disorder at some point in their lives.<sup>3</sup>

## Top incidents that have impacted mobile workers the most

**Working in a high risk environment  
(country or workplace at risk...)**

**Personal incident (sexual assault,  
theft and robbery, road traffic  
accident, workplace injury...)**

**Terrorist or environmental incident  
(earthquake)**

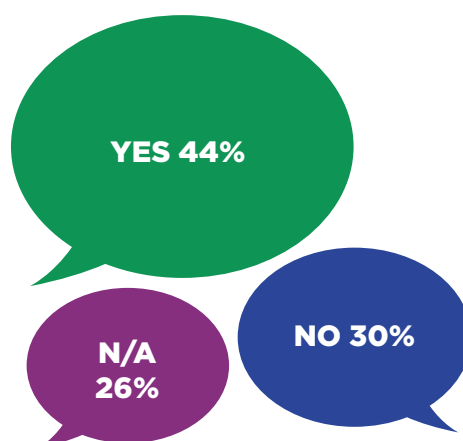
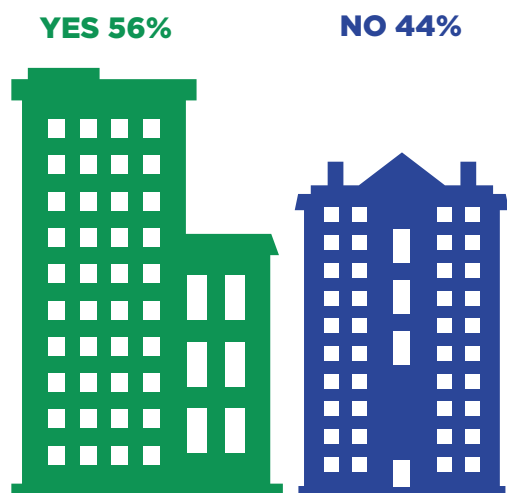
**Death or severe injuries of a colleague**



## SUPPORTING MOBILE WORKERS

56% of organisations currently support the mental health of their travellers

Only 44% of those organisations proactively communicate this emotional support to their mobile workers



# MANAGING HIGH IMPACT LOW PROBABILITY INCIDENTS

## CASE STUDY

**In the early morning of 22 March 2016, three coordinated suicide bombings occurred in Brussels, two at Zaventem airport and one at Maelbeek metro station. Over 300 people were injured and 35 were killed.**

The International SOS crisis management team immediately got to work. A dedicated team of medical and travel security experts dealt with member requests for information and assistance. Medical personnel were deployed on the ground and psychological support provided to clients who had injured personnel.

### Timeline of events

- **07.10am - News breaks:**  
Explosion at Zaventem, identified and confirmed by our teams
- **07.35am - Reporting post-incident:**  
First Special Advisory sent
- **15.30pm - Assistance:**  
On the ground medical support

### Helping our members

Within six hours, a nurse from our Paris Assistance Centre was on the ground. He attended many patients from different organisations in various hospitals, tracking down members who were lost or needed assistance. Moreover, he was able to reassure our clients and the patients' family members.

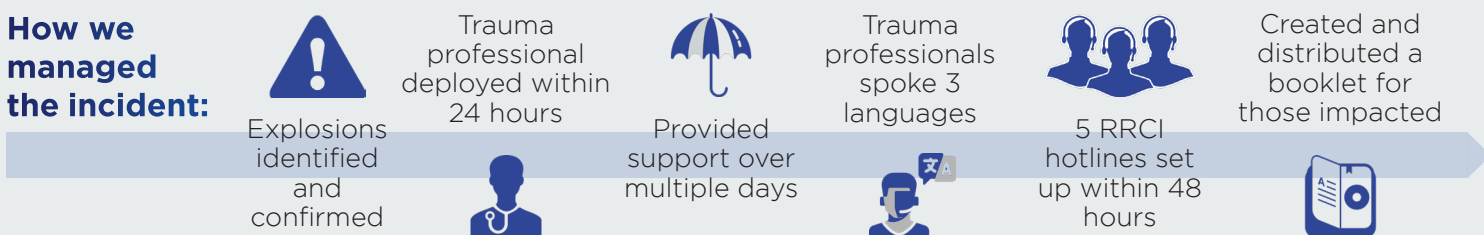
### Informing and supporting our clients

On the same day of the attack, we hosted a Q&A session for our clients to explain the situation and provide guidance. In addition to this, we also provided crisis support to organisations, so they could better understand their exposure and how best to respond to the situation.

### Continued support

We advised clients on how best to manage their own travel policies, which educated them on their ability to prepare and react.

### How we managed the incident:



## 268 CASES ON 22 MARCH

For most cases, we supported members with information and advice. Twenty cases required ground support, accommodation and flight support.

### EMOTIONAL SUPPORT CASES

An event that may start out as a medical or security crisis can turn into, or result in, an emotional support case. Other examples besides a terrorist attack include car accidents or natural disasters.



# PROTECTING MOBILE WORKERS

“Companies invest in the success of their mobile workforce’s business trips and overseas assignments; however, emotional support systems are often overlooked as a way to decrease the likelihood of a failed assignment. Organisations sending employees on short- or long-term assignments abroad need to consider pre-trip emotional support

that is appropriate for the destination and reactive response support systems that can be implemented quickly in times of an unexpected incident or accident,” said Dr Andrew Ebringer, Regional Medical Director.



- As published in the International SOS Foundation Return on Prevention study, the cost of a failed assignment is up to \$950,000<sup>4</sup>. Providing emotional support is an important aspect of setting the traveller up for success to fulfil their assignment.
- Emotional support during the assignment can help the traveller or expat adjust to the shock of their new environment.
- Those who have shorter but frequent trips rarely see their workload reduced to offset the time away from their desk. This can produce anxiety as work continues to accumulate whilst away.

Research shows the potentially negative effects of travel range from physical health to social relationships and emotional well-being<sup>1</sup>. This expands beyond the traditional focus on medical assistance and travel security advice whilst abroad.

Support for one’s overall well-being should include all three aspects of travel – medical, security and emotional support – as a holistic and integrated travel risk management service offered by organisations to their travellers. These should not be isolated services with separate phone calls and protocols, but one source of aid.

Having a comprehensive travel risk management program helps ensure the overall safety and well-being of mobile travellers and provides peace-of-mind to organisations that they are fulfilling their Duty of Care whilst protecting their workers.

# SUPPORTING DAY-TO-DAY STRESS

## CASE STUDIES

China is ranked as the 4th largest agricultural exporter and the 2nd largest agricultural importer in the world. It is predicted that China will account for 43% of global growth in agricultural demand by 2050.

**An Australian animal feed Sales Manager was on a four-week tour of his clients' farms in remote China when he contacted one of our Assistance Centres as he was having difficulty coping with the isolation associated with his work travels.**

### Problem

The patient was experiencing a high level of stress that he had not anticipated. He disclosed that not only was he having difficulty coping with the isolation and language barriers that prevented him from connecting with his co-workers in China, but he also felt overwhelmed.

### Solution

After receiving support from our counsellor, he opted to take telephone counselling sessions which eliminated his need to travel for face-to-face sessions as he was unable to spare the time away from his farm visit schedule. We were able to arrange sessions with a provider experienced in counselling international assignees & business travellers. Through multiple sessions, he was taught strategies on how to cope with pressures both in his personal and professional life.

### Impact

He commented: "The counselling has really been life-changing. I feel that I am able to focus at work. I don't feel so overwhelmed. Thank you for the support."

---

**A Swiss employee on assignment contacted one of our Assistance Centres as she was having difficulty coping with her new post in the Czech Republic.**

### Problem

Two months after relocating, the patient was experiencing a **high level of stress that she had not anticipated**. She disclosed that not only was she having difficulty connecting with her co-workers but felt overwhelmed as the primary caregiver to her young son. Her husband was not arriving to the Czech Republic for another 3 months.

### Solution

After receiving support from our counsellor, she opted to take telephone counselling sessions because they eliminated the need for her to take time away from her child and travel to the face-to-face sessions.

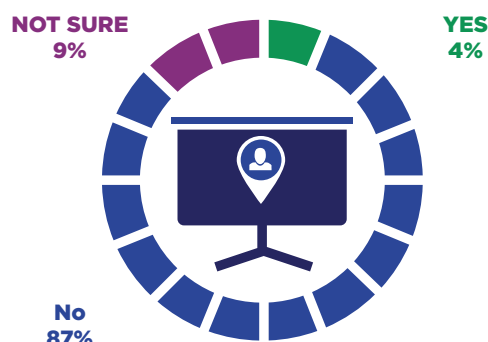
We were able to arrange **sessions with a provider experienced in counselling international assignees**. Through multiple sessions, she was taught strategies on how to cope with pressures both in her personal and professional life.

# MANAGING EMPLOYEES' EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

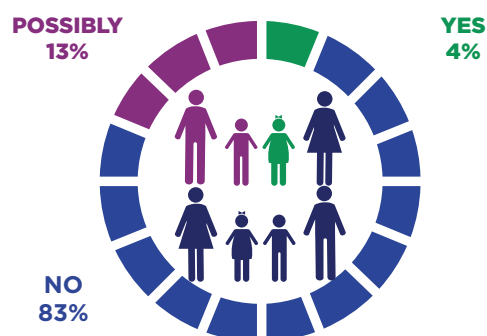
Implementing an employee health check program means companies can demonstrate a Duty of Care to their employees whilst preventing avoidable disruption and costly hospitalisations or evacuations due to a medical incident. Health check programs aren't about stopping employees from working but rather ensuring your employees are prepared both physically and mentally for the tasks required of them.

## Pre-trip and assignment screening

87% of organisations do not have a mental health screening process pre- and post-travel for employees with a history of emotional or mental health issues

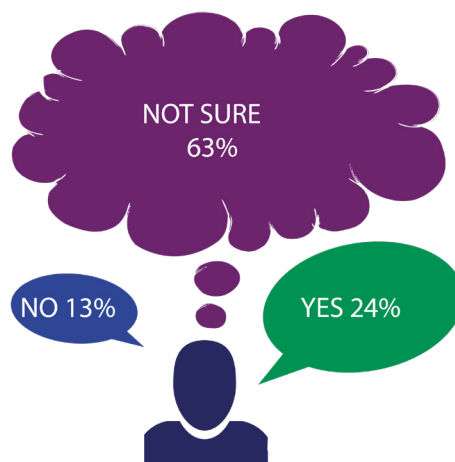


83% of organisations do not provide mental health screenings for family members of international assignees and expats pre- and post-deployment



## Insurance and mental health

Only 24% of respondents knew if their travel insurance policy covers mental health related treatment and repatriation costs incurred due to mental illness



## Collecting personal information

In order to prepare mobile workers for travel, and to provide support to these employees when working in remote locations, companies may seek sensitive personal information from their employees.

When requesting personal information, it's important to clearly articulate:

- Why the information is being collected and that there is some reasonable requirement for the employer to have that information; and
- How the information will be used.

Once this information is collected, members may have certain obligations, including:

- To ensure the personal information is not used for any purpose other than the original non-discriminatory purpose:
- Not to disclose or communicate the information to anyone unless necessary; and
- To take reasonable steps to destroy or de-identify the information when it is no longer required.



# MANAGING CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

## Approaching a sensitive conversation regarding mental health issues<sup>6</sup>

Every conversation a manager has with a team member who may be experiencing mental health issues will be different. Sometimes, a team member may feel able to be very open with their manager from the

very first meeting. In other situations, it may be difficult for the team member to open up and might take several conversations.

Below are a few tips and considerations for a manager to think about when approaching a conversation with a team member.

### Before the conversation takes place

- › Choose an appropriate place. It should be in private and usually be one-to-one
- › Consider what you have observed that concerns you and note examples of this
- › Keep the meeting as informal and relaxed as possible
- › Make it clear anything discussed will be kept confidential unless agreed otherwise

### At the start of the conversation

- › Approach the conversation in a sensitive and calm manner, and manage emotions carefully
- › Ask how they are doing
- › Explain the reason for the conversation
- › Remember to ask simple, open and non-judgmental questions

### During the conversation

- › Listen carefully and don't make assumptions
- › Reassure them that you are there to try to help
- › Be patient and don't try to force them into talking if they don't want to

#### **If they disclose they are experiencing mental health issues:**

- › Check if they have been to the GP and if so, what they recommended and whether any medication has been prescribed that may affect their performance or make it unsafe for them to perform certain duties
- › Discuss whether there are any parts of their role they are struggling with or feel unable to do
- › Adjourn for a break if emotions take over or to think through what has been discussed if the seriously unexpected arises

#### **If they become angry or distressed:**

- › Stay calm
- › Reassure them that you are only trying to help them, and as their manager you are responsible for ensuring they are coping
- › Adjourn for a break if necessary

### At the end of the conversation

- › Check if they think anything else should be discussed

#### **If they have disclosed they are experiencing mental health issues:**

- › Encourage the team member to talk to their GP to get an expert opinion (if not done already)
- › Highlight sources of support within the organisation such as a mental health champion and outside the organisation such as mental health charities
- › Agree what will happen next, such as whether they will be referred to occupational health or if a further meeting will be arranged to discuss support options

#### **If they have stated that there is no problem:**

- › Respect their position
- › Make clear you are available at any time if they ever want to talk

#### **If they are on authorised absence from work:**

- › Discuss what they would like their colleagues to know about the reason for their absence
- › Agree what information can be shared and what must stay confidential

### After the conversation

#### **If they have disclosed they are experiencing mental health issues:**

- › Think about potential support or adaptations that may help
- › Arrange a further meeting to discuss support options
- › Document what was discussed and agreed

#### **If they have stated that there is no problem:**

- › Monitor the situation and if you still have concerns, consider seeking advice from sources such as HR, senior management and Occupation Health
- › Be available and approachable in case they want to talk to you at a later point about their health

## Fulfilling Duty of Care obligations

As discussed in the Australian<sup>7</sup> and New Zealand<sup>8</sup> Harmonised Workplace Health and Safety legislation, it is critical for employers to combine an immediate-response approach with a proactive one when it comes to managing mental health issues. This responsibility integrates the topic of mental health into the wider Duty of Care agenda.

Companies that send staff or contractors overseas on business or have expatriate staff living abroad, must extend the same

Duty of Care to all staff, regardless of their location. The duties owed to workers under the WHS Laws are criminal in nature. This means that businesses and individuals who fail to discharge the duties imposed on them are exposed to criminal prosecution and, if found guilty, subject to conviction for a criminal offence.



Regardless of if the trips are short and frequent or long deployments, travel can expose people to unfamiliar and unexpected situations. From feelings of homesick to sensory overload, many situations can trigger stress and anxiety.

## **Taking a proactive approach to offering emotional support services can provide the following benefits:**

- **Business Continuity:** exposure to new environments, minor medical conditions or simply being too far from loved ones can impact your mobile workforce. These events trigger stress and anxiety. This can lead to distraction, business disruption or even something more serious.
- **Peace of Mind:** in times of stress or anxiety, a mobile workforce needs professional emotional support often at short notice and in their native language. Timely support can make the difference between controlling a situation and an event spiralling out of control. Easy access to services through a single point of contact helps people make the right decisions at a critical time.
- **Well-being:** short-term counselling support services assist people with psychological issues, wherever, whenever. Mobile workers should have their medical, safety and emotional needs addressed by a single incident manager, in a holistic way via a single assistance number.

## **RESOURCES**

### **<sup>4</sup> RETURN ON PREVENTION - PREVENT**

[www.internationalsos.com.au/corporate/research-and-insight-corporate](http://www.internationalsos.com.au/corporate/research-and-insight-corporate)

### **<sup>5</sup> REQUEST FOR INFORMATION - HERBERT SMITH FREEHILLS BRIEFING PAPER**

<http://app.learn.internationalsos.com/e/er?s=1158236727&lid=3674&elq>

### **<sup>6</sup> APPROACHING A SENSITIVE CONVERSATION**

<http://m.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/8/i/Approaching-a-sensitive-conversation-regarding-mental-ill-health.pdf>

### **<sup>7</sup> WORKPLACE HEALTH & SAFETY LEGISLATION - AUSTRALIA**

[www.internationalsos.com.au/education/education-research-and-insights](http://www.internationalsos.com.au/education/education-research-and-insights)

### **<sup>8</sup> WORKPLACE HEALTH & SAFETY LEGISLATION - NEW ZEALAND**

[www.internationalsos.com.au/education/education-research-and-insights](http://www.internationalsos.com.au/education/education-research-and-insights)

## **Citations**

<sup>1</sup> Cohen, S. A., & Gossling, S. (2015, August 3). A darker side of hypermobility. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0308518X15597124>

<sup>2</sup> The most vulnerable travelers: patients with mental disorders. (2011). *World Psychiatry*, 10(3), 237th ser. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3190242/>

<sup>3</sup> National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 2007. (2008, October 23). <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Latestproducts/4326.0Main%20Features32007>

# INTRODUCING THE WORLD'S FIRST EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FOR A MOBILE WORKFORCE

Dealing with the complexity of business travel or life abroad can negatively impact your mobile workforce's health and well-being. The world's first emotional support service for a mobile workforce provides expert support tailored to accommodate travel schedules.

## Service components

Emotional Support works alongside medical and travel security assistance to deliver:

- › Seamless integration between medical, travel security and WorkPlace Options emotional support services (no need to make additional calls)
- › Unlimited manager / HR telephone consultation
- › Support services available 24/7, every day of the year
- › Counselling method tailored to a mobile workforce: phone, video-call or face-to-face
- › Support in over 60 languages



## PROJECT TEAM

**Dr Andrew Ebringer**, Regional Medical Director  
**Dr Jo Holdaway**, Medical Director, Mental Health  
**Sally Napper**, Regional Security Director  
**Rebecca Malzacher**, Marketing Director  
**Claire Antczak**, Marketing Executive

## CONTACT

**t:** +61 (0) 2 9372 2400  
**e:** [apacinfo@internationalsos.com](mailto:apacinfo@internationalsos.com)

International SOS, Level 4, Building B,  
Pinnacle Office Park, 4 Drake Avenue,  
Macquarie Park, NSW 2113

The Business Travel and Emotional Support Survey is an International SOS survey targeted to those who are responsible for the health, safety and well-being of their mobile workers. The survey findings represent the responses from nearly 100 of Australia and New Zealand's leading organisation.