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## Occupational Stress among Long Route Truck Drivers: A Study

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**Abstract:** *Long route truck drivers are the people who travel from one place to another to deliver goods by truck or trolleys. Researchers have identified a number of health concerns and other health related issues, which include obesity, heart problems, high blood pressure, diabetes and more. These conditions are very prevalent in the trucking industry, and impact not only the driver's health, but also their ability to stay on the road (Thorpe, 2017). Long working hours, night work, or spending extended periods on the road away from friends and family can isolate drivers and leave them too exhausted to nourish their relationships. This descriptive study was undertaken among 200 long route truck drivers to find out the occupational stress experienced by the long route truck drivers. Purposive sampling technique was followed. The study indicates that these drivers experience tremendous stress in several areas. The study suggests that these drivers should have a periodical medical check-up and counseling services to find out the problems related to their ailments and take steps to reduce the same.*

**Key Words:** *Long Route Truck Drivers, Obesity, Occupational Stress, Ergonomic Factors, Environment.*

### Introduction

Drivers are responsible for the movement of people and goods from one place to another through a transport system of trucking. A truck driver is commonly referred to as a trucker or driver, but in India is known as a lorry driver. Truck driving is a profession that is vital to the economy of every country, yet it is a career about which most people know very little. Larsen (2004) reported that surveys of the general public indicate that most people are ambivalent about truck driving and have a poor view of trucking as a whole. Truck drivers provide an essential service to industrialized societies by transporting finished goods and raw materials over land, typically to and from manufacturing plants, retail and distribution centers. Truck drivers are also responsible for inspecting their vehicles for mechanical items or issues relating to safe operation.

### **Meaning and Understanding of Long Route Truck Drivers**

Long route truck drivers are the people who travel from one place to another to deliver goods by truck or trolleys. If they start their journey they will be away for 15 to 20 to 25 days from their families. It is their task to deliver the goods in order to earn their livelihood. During this travel they face multiple problems. These drivers carry mostly heavy and sometimes dangerous goods. They are not sure of their destination but they are clear about their task.

Long route truck drivers mostly come from poor family background in order to support and sustain their families. Therefore, they take up this job as a driver to support economically and bring change in the economic status. They are mostly on constant move from one place to other, one city to the other. These drivers have minimal social life, lot of health issues, which come their way. They are susceptible to adverse behavioural patterns and develop aggression arising from their workload. They also have the problem of unavailability of mechanics and technical issues. Therefore, long route truck driver's life style is more or less not a sought of job due to their long absences from home and the kind of work that they are carrying on.

### **Problems and Challenges**

Economic growth accelerated by market liberalization and global market integration, has created many significant opportunities for men in particular in the urban areas. But rural poverty has led many men to leave their families and villages in search of work, changing traditional patterns of sexual unions (Upadhyay, 2000).

India has one of the largest road networks in the world. The trucking industry is booming in India due to heightened consumerism facilitated by economic growth and a huge demand in transportation of goods. It is said that HIV travels along trucking routes and highways with numerous rest areas providing food, alcoholic drink and the services of commercial sex workers for lonely truckers (Bryan et. al, 2000; Singhal and Rogers, 2004). Perhaps, we can trace the extent of transmission of this virus if we compare truck routes connecting major cities with the rates of infection of people who are living close to these highways. Undoubtedly, one would find an increase in HIV prevalence rate.

Research has linked sitting for very long periods of time to a number of health concerns and other health related issues, which include obesity, heart problems, high blood pressure, diabetes and more. These conditions are very prevalent in the trucking industry, and impact not only the driver's health, but also their ability to stay on the road (Thorpe, 2017).

Backache is another problem faced by the long route truck drivers. Lower back pain is a growing pandemic in the Indian drivers with prevalence 40 percentage to 69 percentages (Vink & Kantola, 2010). Back pain in truck drivers is of multi-factorial such as vibrations, strained postures for long hours, etc. Different states of India are interconnected through the National highways. Throughout the year, the truck drivers are encountering the rough hilly terrain, hair pin bend, narrow roads, adverse climatic conditions and natural calamities.

### **Occupational Stress among the Truck Drivers**

Truck drivers experience stress from many sources. Long working hours, night work, or spending extended periods on the road away from friends and family can isolate drivers and leave them too exhausted to nourish their relationships. Pressure to stay on schedule even when road conditions are bad or they are fatigued can strain driver's nerves. Delivering or picking up loads can be taxing—drivers are often required to wait in their trucks for long and unpredictable periods of time; they may be denied opportunities for food, water, and restroom facilities; and they may be treated disrespectfully by shipping and receiving personnel to make the required loan or lease payments on their truck due to low compensation rates.

Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006) data on injury and illness show that the drivers of heavy trucks and tractor-trailers in the US are associated with second highest number of occupational illnesses and injuries for the past three years.

Dhere A.M. (2010) carried out a study on Impact of Pollution on Psychological Setting among Indian Truck Drivers. Trucking worker have wide variety of problems like decrease immune system, increases stress on body parts. It is an in-depth pilot tested structured interview schedule used to investigate 240 truck drivers on micro level things of physical and psychological health of truck drivers. It was found that 59.5 percent of truck drivers were affected by long distance hearing loss while 15.4 percent of the respondents faced regular fatigue. These illnesses were occurred because of irregular work

schedule, less sleep and high work related stress. The study found that 66 percent of the truckers were married and many of them were spent more than one month away from their home. During group discussion many truck drivers agreed to sexual exposure with many women during journey. But it is a common opinion that they had selected safe sexual contact with adequate measures. The truck drivers reported that they were abused and treated badly by the traffic police in different states. This physical and verbal abuse closely linked with decline in the social status of the truck drivers.

A review by Costa et.al (2000) noted the impact of non-standard work schedules on Social relationship. 141 people engaged in shift and night works are frequently out of phase with society, and can face greater difficulties in their social lives because most family and social actives are arranged according to the day oriented rhythms of the general population.

The truck drivers are constantly exposed to environmental overstimulation (e.g., noise, smog, variable light conditions) (Biggs, H.; Dingsdag, D.; Stenson, N. 2009), and difficult ergonomic conditions (Tse, J. L.M.; Flin, R.; Mearns, K. 2006).

Since a large group of Indian working population is involved in truck driving and hence an attempt is made through this study to understand the level of occupational stress experienced by the long route Truck Drivers.

### **Materials and Method**

This descriptive study was carried out among 200 long route truck drivers in Mangaluru Region, Karnataka State. The respondents were selected for the study through purposive sampling technique. The work stress among the respondents under this study is measured using a 24 item scale developed and validated by the researcher taking various aspects of work stress in to consideration. The respondents were explained the purpose of the study and ensured confidentiality. The data gathered was coded, tabulated and analyzed using SPSS Version 20 and statistically tested.

### **Results and Discussion**

The Socio-demographic data reveals that a majority (42.5%) of the respondents were in the age group of 21-30 years, while 29.5 percent of them were in the age group of 31-40 years. A majority (67.5%) of the respondents were married, while 31.5 percent of them were unmarried.

A majority (65%) of the respondents were from the rural areas, while 27 percent of them were from urban areas. A relative majority (37%) of the respondents had educational qualification up to High School, while (34%) of them stated that they were educated up to primary and higher primary. A majority (65.5%) of the respondents had their own residential house. A vast majority (90.5%) of the respondents stated that they were full time truck drivers. More than half (53%) of the truck drivers stated that they get monthly income of less than Rs. 10,000, while 40 percent of them get monthly income of Rs. 10,000 - Rs. 20,000.

A majority (60%) of the respondent stated that they were not getting the benefits of Employee State Insurance (ESI), while 40 percent of them stated that they received ESI Benefits. A majority (61%) of the respondent stated that they have Provident Fund and a majority (58.5%) of the respondent stated that they will be getting Gratuity benefits.

### **Occupational Stress**

The item analysis of the occupational stress scale revealed that a majority (46.5%) of the respondents said that they felt their body is tense all over some time. Another (42.5%) of the respondents stated that they have experienced severe or chronic lower back pain most of the time. A relative majority (38.5%) of the respondents stated that they had problems with their bowels some time. A majority (40%) of the respondents stated that they lacked physical energy some time. A Relative majority 27 percent of them stated that sometimes they take pills to get sleep.

A relative majority (38.5%) of the respondents stated that sometimes they feel tired no matter how much they sleep. A relative majority (34%) of the respondents stated that they consumed alcohol or drugs to relax most of the time.

A relative majority (33.5%) of the respondents stated that they consumed a lot of junk food most of the time. A relative majority (33.5%) of them stated that most of the times had no structured time for meals and sleep respectively. A majority (42.5%) of the respondents stated that in a given week they take one prescription drug without the consultation of the physician some time while 24 percent of them stated that they most of the time take one prescription drug without the consultation of the physician.

A relative majority (41.5%) of the respondents stated that they had some times problem with their sex life. A relative majority (43.5%) of the respondents stated that sometimes they deal with hassles and problems by consciously avoid thinking or talking about it, while 35 percent of them most of the time dealt with hassles and problems by consciously avoid thinking or talking about it.

Further (42%) of the respondents stated that sometimes they felt that they should not show their emotions to their family, while 35 percent of them stated that most of the times they feel that they should not show their emotions to their family.

Another (45%) of the respondents stated that sometimes they felt that they are not doing justice to their family. A relative majority (42.5%) of the respondents stated that sometimes they had temper outburst which can't be controlled.

A majority (40.5%) of the respondents stated that sometimes they felt extremely sensitive and irritable, while one-fourth (25.5%) of them stated that most of the times they felt extremely sensitive and irritable.

A relative majority (34%) of them stated that most of the times they felt like they can't trust anyone. A relative majority (34%) of the respondents stated that sometimes they felt bad and thought of hurting themselves.

A majority (43%) of them stated that it is difficult to plan time and activities to constructively release their stress, while 36.5 percent of them stated that sometimes it is difficult to plan time and activities to constructively release their stress.

A majority (59.5%) of the respondents stated that sometimes spend less than 30 minutes a week talking casually with neighbors and others.

A relative majority (32%) of the respondents stated that sometime they don't feel to pray and get strengthened, while 29 percent stated that they feel to pray and get strengthened.

A relative majority (42%) of the respondents stated that sometime they have various other interests which remain neglected due to lack of time.

A relative majority (40%) of the respondents stated that sometime their family complains that they don't spend time due to their erratic time of work;

while 34 percent of them stated that most of the time their families complain that they don't spend time due to their erratic time of work.

A majority (35.5%) of them stated that most of the time they wished to have more financial resource for work assigned to them.

Table 1 : Results of One Way ANOVA for Age and Stress

Indicator	Age										Statistical Inference df= 199
	Below 20 N=5		21-30 N=85		31-40 N=59		41-50 N=44		51 & above N=7		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Stress	75.20	9.63	75.05	9.69	74.17	8.10	78.18	7.98	77.57	7.41	F=1.507 p>.0.05 (NS)

The above table shows the results of one-way ANOVA for age on the Stress.

There is no significance with regard to the Stress and the age (F= 1.507, p>.05) of the respondents. It indicates that age and work stress are independent of each other. Long route truck drivers of all age groups experience occupational stress.

Table 2 : Results of One Way ANOVA for Marital Status on Stress

Indicator	Marital Status								Statistical Inference df= 199
	Unmarried N=63		Married N=135		Separated N=1		Divorced N=1		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Stress	72.70	9.46	76.70	8.16	86.00	.	94.00	.	F=5.145 P<.0.05 (Sig)

The above table shows the results of one-way ANOVA for Marital Status on the Stress.

It shows that there is significance with regard to the marital status and stress (F=5.145, p<0.05). It shows that married respondents had more stress than the others. It may be because they may be thinking about their families and commitments as they are away for work.

Table 3: Results of One Way ANOVA for Monthly Income on the Stress

Indicator	Monthly Income								Statistical Inference df= 199
	Less than Rs. 10,000 N=106		Rs. 10,000- Rs. 20,000 N=80		Rs. 20,000- Rs. 30,000 N=13		Above Rs. 40,000 N=1		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Stress	75.71	9.03	74.91	8.42	79.31	9.63	65.00	.	F=1.411 (p>0.05) (NS)

The above table shows the results of one-way ANOVA for monthly income on the Stress.

It shows that there is no significance with regard to the monthly income and the stress (F=1.411, p<0.05) among the respondents. It only indicates that long route truck drivers from all income groups experience occupational stress.

**Recommendations**

1. The truck drivers get a minimum salary which is not enough to meet the expenses on the road. Therefore, the company or the owner for whom they are working should fix a minimum salary so as to meet the daily expenses with regard to tolls to reach the destination.
2. The truck drivers are considered to be in an unorganized sector due to which most of the drivers are not covered under the Social Security Scheme, the owners should make it a point to include all the permanent employees under the social security scheme and give them benefits of Employees’ State Insurance (ESI), Provident Fund (PF) and Gratuity. This would help them to lead a better quality of life in future. If they are brought to the main stream they could get more benefits.



3. The drivers should form truck driver's clubs, to where they can meet up and exchange their views of trucking. The clubs should work as a stress releaser and aim for a better quality of life.
4. The truck drivers consume alcohol and drugs to reduce their fatigue. The clubs they form should try to create awareness programmes and help them get rid of these vices.
5. The clubs formed can conduct activities that can help them to have a better standard of living. It will also help them to have social gatherings or celebrate the festivals together.
6. Most of the truck drivers are ailing from occupation related pains, like back pain, shoulder pain, headache and other ailments. The drivers should have a periodical medical check-up and counseling services to find out the problems related to their ailments and take steps to reduce their ailments.
7. The truck drivers have junk food in dhabas which is unhealthy. There should be pit stops or petrol bunks where these drivers get a clean and healthy option for their food on the road.
8. Commercial Truck Manufacturers should adopt truck drivers through driver training institutes and give them jobs with substantial salaries. This is one of the best strategies which Ashok Leyland limited had started in the past and it is doing well. The objective is to train the drivers and attach these drivers to the respective owners who buy the trucks from Ashok Leyland Ltd. The Job security is ensured to the truck driver and the respective person can be shuffled from Logistics Company to other Logistics Company like a job rotation as prevailing in high profile corporate employees.

### **Conclusion**

The trucking industry plays a crucial role in driving the growth of India, the stressful and demanding nature of the work undertaken by the truck drivers impact their physical and mental well-being. Unusually prolonged working hours, long periods away from home and family, difficult road and driving conditions, all emerged as issues impacting their health and well-being. The ergonomic risk factors faced by Truck Drivers as a result of awkward and fixed postures, repetitive twisting of back and neck and working and sleeping

in tight spaces result in chronic back, neck and joint pain. There should be training on exercises to be conducted for the truck drivers so that they can relax themselves and keep their mind and body healthy. It is very important that they are fit and healthy so that they can perform the given task of reaching the destination in the intended time. In this context, the owners' and the government should introduce and implement programmes which benefit the drivers to keep them fit.

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