
Long Route Truck Driving – A 360 Degree Review

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Abstract: *Truck drivers are the vital part in any economy as they help us get us the resources, be it raw materials or finished goods. These individuals risk their lives to get these products to the common man but they themselves are denied of certain facilities. They face the extreme weather conditions, uneven road paths and still deliver the goods to the destined place. They face many hurdles on the way to mention a few – robbery, bribe the police and miss their family in this long journey. They face emotional problems like loneliness, not satisfied in their relationships, depression, anxiety among others. Due to this strenuous job the health problems they face are back pain, headache and vision problems. Since they are away from home they depend on the foods that are unhealthy for the body. On the whole this article reviews the overall problems faced by the long route truck drivers. This paper is based on the research articles published on the given topic.*

Key Words: *Truck Drivers, Problems, depression, Awareness.*

Introduction

Most skilled drivers refer to truck driving not as a job, but as a “way of life”. The responsibilities go so much further than just holding the wheel and shifting gears and, especially for over-the-road drivers, trucking is not a switch that one just turn off at the end of the day. Dozens of different pieces have to fall into place for one to be successful, and one has to deal with weather, traffic, dispatch, safety, life on the road, etc., and it all falls on one, the driver, to get the job done safely and efficiently.

A truck driver (commonly referred to as a trucker, teamster or driver in the United States and Canada; a truckie in Australia and New Zealand; a lorry driver, or driver in Ireland, the United Kingdom, India and Pakistan) is a person who earns a living as the driver of a truck (usually a semi truck, box truck or dump truck).

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 all their vehicles for mechanical items or issues relating to safe operation. Others, such as driver/sales workers, are also responsible for sales and customer service.

The demands, particularly upward of 300 days per year on the road, will certainly limit what time one spends at home, thus impacting relationships with those around one. If an individual is attracted to flexibility, 20 hours of isolation each day, and following a different routine from the rest of the population, then this career is definitely worth exploring.

Methodology

The objective of this paper is to review the articles published in national and international journals and periodicals on the problems of truck drivers across the Globe with special reference to India.

Review Background

Truck drivers have a long history of being held in high esteem by the public. There's an enduring cultural attraction to the 'Knights of the Road. Truck drivers in India have to travel long distances in their lifetime, on an extensive spread of National and State highways that range from well-engineered roads to a complete absence of concrete roads. Their occupation predisposes them to a multitude of risk factors such as prolonged sitting and motor vehicle driving, tight running schedules, reduced rest breaks, traffic congestion, the sedentary nature of job, (Borle A, Agawane S, Gunjal S, Tayde P, 2012) and resultant physical, psychological and behavioral problems. Research on long distance drivers from the Western countries too has established the presence of musculoskeletal and ergonomic problems, stress related manifestations, fatigue and insomnia-related problems, as well as poor sexual and reproductive health (Apostolopoulos Y, et al 2008).

With six million truck drivers in India, the trucking industry represents a notable proportion of the labour force (2.5%). The Indian trucking sector contributes on average 8 lakhs vehicle per annum. But due to the lack of good infrastructure in India there is paucity of truck drivers. Tata Motors, Ashok Leyland and Eicher Motors are major domestic commercial vehicles in India. Truck Drivers are subjected to strenuous long hours of tiresome job and the consequences Often drivers are forced to be behind the wheels for over 15 hours a day (Kumar, Rajkumar, 2015).

The above studies highlight the need to explore the problems of truck drivers in detail which is done subsequently.

Some of the Common Problems faced by the Truck Drivers

Physical Conditions

A large proportion of truck drivers in India suffered from some morbidity and that the prevalence of common problems such as musculoskeletal and visual impairment compared to previous years. Past researches have reported the prevalence of musculoskeletal problems, watering from eyes, cough, breathlessness and dermatological conditions to be 77%, 19%, 25%, 27% and 18%, respectively (Kartikeyan S, et al, 2004).

Shattell, et. al. (2010) stated that majority (76.3%) of interviewed truckers reported one or multiple physical health problems, including musculoskeletal discomforts such as back pain, knee pain, neck pain, and leg and hip problems (16.9%), hypertension (16.9%), diabetes (10.2%), and many also complained of overweight or obesity (8.2%). Mental health problems were acknowledged by 18.7 percent of the truckers. More specifically, stress and anxiety were identified by 11.9 percent of the drivers interviewed.

Back Pain

Back pain is one of the most frequent trucker problems that arise from doing this job. Most likely they are required to help load and unload the freight. They have to be prepared for this because as they will need to adapt good lifting practices. To avoid injuring the back, they should always bend their knees before picking up or lowering a heavy box, move the box a little to test the weight before lifting. If the box is really heavy, get a tight grip on it and move slow and smoothly - no sudden jerking motions, and not to twist the body during the lift.

Another less obvious cause of back pain is a result of sitting for long hours. As they are constantly working under deadline, there won't be a lot of time for stopping and allowing the body to get some exercise. Truckers spend hours glued to their seat in the same position. Meanwhile, the seat may be bouncing a bit due to the movement of the vehicle underneath. The spine may also take on some wear and tear.

Low back disorders include spinal disc problems such as hernias and spondylolisthesis, muscle and soft tissue injuries. In addition to the normal degenerative aging process, epidemiological studies reveal that poor ergonomic factors in the workplace contribute to low back disorders in a healthy back or accelerate existing changes in an already damaged back. Poor ergonomic work factors increase the load or strain on the back. This may arise from many situations, for example lifting, twisting, bending, awkward movements, stretching, and static postures. Tasks include physical work, manual handling

and vehicle driving where whole body vibration is known. Low back pain is a growing pandemic in the Indian drivers with prevalence 40% to 69% (Kumar 1999). Back pain in truck drivers is of multifactorial such as vibrations, strained postures for long hours, etc, (Laxmaiah 2000). The basic cause of back pain among the truck drivers is the bad condition of the roads.

To protect the back while driving, the drivers should make sure that their seat is well adjusted in the best position for their body. They can also purchase a special seat cushion designed for trucks. Another tip is to stretch the back, arms and legs during breaks to loosen up those stiff muscles.

Dietary Needs

Most of the truck drivers have poor dietary needs, as they drive for long hours on end and your physical health can spiral out of control. Owner operators are constantly under the gun and often don't bother with trying to eat healthier foods.

High calorie, high sugar food can lead to more serious health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure and chronic digestive ailments. The truck drivers should be sure that they aren't loading down the body with lots of empty calories that don't add anything to overall health and well-being.

Sleep Deprivation

Another taxing issue that a lot of truck drivers deal with is lack of sleep. Again, the pressure to get from one destination to other as quickly as possible meant that truckers are tempted to skip taking a sleep break. Lack of sleep can cause one to experience ailments such as heart disease, irregular heartbeat, diabetes and stroke. Lesser problems are mental fog, forgetfulness, depression, poor judgment, weight gain and reduced sex drive. On top of all that it can make them more prone to accidents (Tully J, 2017).

As you can see, owner operators must always be vigilant about staying in the best physical condition possible. The trucking lifestyle can be very rewarding if they are willing to take care of the mental and physical health. A healthy truck driver is both successful and a benefit to society. Sleep disorders have been linked to a number of generalized health and behavioral disorders, including reduced efficiency while operating a motor vehicle. Globally, thousands of accidents occur due to lack of sleep, tiredness, and fatigue.

HIV/AIDS

National AIDS Control Program III (2007-2012) has given high priority to the truck drivers for the exposure to HIV infection (Park K, 2009). In India, HIV/AIDS has entered into third decade, not as a single epidemic but made up of a number of distinct epidemics. The epidemic shifts from the highest risk groups Commercial Sex Workers (CSW), men having sex with men, and intravenous drug users] to bridge population like clients of sex workers, truck drivers, and migrant population and then to general population (Government of India, 1999). Truck drivers constitute a well-known bridge population for the infection and transmission of HIV/AIDS. Due to migratory nature of work for truck drivers, making them stay away from their families leads to their visiting CSW. Some studies have documented their knowledge and behaviour (Chaturvedi S, et al 2006) There has been a gradual increase in knowledge of truck drivers about HIV/AIDS. Manjunath et al., (2002) conducted a study with the objective to determine the prevalence and pattern of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and study sexual lifestyles of long-distance truck drivers and their assistants in south India. It is found that the higher median age, education less than primary school level, longer duration of occupation, longer duration of each trip and a previous history of genital ulcer disease were significant risk factors for the acquisition of HIV infection.

The truck drivers in India lead a life that involves them sleeping for only 2-3 hours a day or taking pills to stay awake. Most of these pills (or as called by them – kali golis) are opium based and addictive. Traffic injuries and fatalities due to loss of sleep and sleep disorders are a growing concern. The main issue is of young truck drivers are vulnerable to crash risk is risk-taking behaviour; speeding, drunk driving with relative failure to include sleep related risk factors.

Psychological Problems

The working conditions of the drivers were rather harsh. During the monsoons the movement of the trucks slow down and the vehicles broke down more often. Apart from the issues caused by the Nature, there are also problems created by the government agencies and local miscreants. The police too demand money for reasons such as non-compliance with respect to vehicle passing, overloading, permits of the vehicle to ply in certain geographies, vehicle condition and the half shading of the head lights. These amounts were reimbursed by the owners, but still dealing with the police is a hassle. The police of certain states created more problems than the rest.

According to Saltzman et al there are heavy truck crashes resulting into the injury or fatality because of adverse environmental conditions (Hansen E S, 1993). From the epidemiological study, it is discovered that truck drivers

face higher risk of death than other men who died from colon cancer, laryngeal cancer, lung cancer, diabetes, ischemic heart disease, non alcohol cirrhosis and motor vehicle accidents (Saltzman G M &, Belzer M H, 2003). It is common understanding on truck drivers who are continuously exposed to various types of pollutants especially air pollutants emitted from vehicles and blowing of horn creates the noise. Gasoline tanker drivers have often experienced acute headaches, dizziness and nausea after exposure to gasoline vapour emitted during loading and unloading.

Traumatic life events are likely to have an impact on long truck drivers just as they might be individuals in other occupational segments, however, the combination of other stressors linked with the transportation environment (i.e., stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness), reduced access to supportive others (family and friends) and to health care providers for mental health promotion and treatment only serves to exacerbate drivers' responses to such events.

Many truckers experience unique and significant occupational stressors that impact their mental health. Truckers' stressors include driving conditions; mental health issues, such as loneliness, boredom, and time away from home; time pressures; fatigue; and perceived negative societal image (Renner, 2004).

Depression is a problem, and, untreated, it can get worse states Mona Shatell, author of several scientific surveys of the mental and physical health of long-haul truckers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, truck driver suicide rates are among the top five professions in the country (Olson S, 2015).

Social Problems

Strain in Relations

Being away from the family is not always easy, especially for those who have kids that need to feel his presence. Only few partners can handle this kind of sacrifice. In fact, numerous drivers end up being divorced after joining this career. This career works better for those who are not yet married since after like 6 months to an year of driving experience, one can manage to find an option that will then get home frequently.

Social isolation and inherent difficulties of establishing and maintaining meaningful social ties during long stretches on the road are found to take a toll on drivers' mental health. Truckers struggle with loneliness and are

overstressed from work pressures and weak support systems. Therefore, commercial driving urgently needs policies designed to curb trucking's harmful effects on driver mental health and public safety and occupational therapy programs designed to improve mental health.

The truckers are usually illiterate or people with very little education. Unlike the truckers in developing countries they live in harsh conditions. For instance truckers in the United States sit in an air conditioned unit and drive their trucks. In India it is a totally different situation. One cannot even imagine an air conditioner used by a trucker. The salaries are also very low and they currently range between 10,000-15000 rupees per month. The employers usually provide other means of support to the drivers. They pay for the education of the kids of the drivers. They also help out with the family occasionally since the drivers are almost always out of town working. This usually runs in a very informal manner and it depends on the employer-employee relation.

Truck drivers can spend up to 14 hours driving and battling severe road conditions in a day, receiving roughly 10 hours off before the beginning of the next shift. They have to drive defensively to ensure that they arrive safely, in time, and with the freight being in the right condition. Legislation regulating the amount of hours that a truck driver needs to be on the road per day or per week does exist, but the rules are never followed. They are commonly bent and broken. Even after working for long hours, truck drivers receive one day off work per week. Most people tend to think that truck drivers are handsomely rewarded but if you take into consideration the amount of risk they put themselves into, their pay is low. Their chances of dying are very high with 12% of work related deaths in that are related from truck driving.

Many truck drivers suffer from unstable relationships due to their nature of work. When one starts off as a trucker, getting a job that will allow him to be home regularly is almost impossible. This means that a driver has to be away from the family for days, until they get their time off duty.

Other Problems

Overloading

This a common issue where the truck drivers overloading their truck to increase their profits. But the reality is far from what meets the eye. The gravity of the situation lies in the fact that many truck drivers are merely workers employed by fleet owners, and all they do is follow commands. Now, if a fleet owner asks a truck driver to transport goods via an

overloaded truck, there is not much a driver can do. Additionally, drivers with their own trucks find themselves in situations where the agency hiring them for a particular assignment requires them to deliver the complete load in one cycle.

Overloading is dangerous as it increases the probability of the truck going out of balance and meeting a fatal accident. It is not just the lives of drivers which is at stake but also the lives of other people on the road who might get potentially harmed (Singh YM, 2016).

Awareness to be Created for Truck Drivers

The community has to invest own conscious effort, to solve personal and interpersonal problems, in order to try to master, minimize or tolerate stress and conflict. The effectiveness of the coping effort depends on: the type of stress, the individual and the circumstances. Coping responses are partly controlled by personality (habitual traits), but also partly by the social environment, particularly the nature of the stressful environment.

Some of the techniques to bring about awareness about the healthy lifestyle and improvisation in working conditions which can be incorporated by the truck drivers and employers are;

1. Opportunity for prayer and meditation for acquiring strength
2. Developing healthy eating habits to keep them healthy and stay fit.
3. Understanding the need for exercise and practicing it on a day today basis.
4. Whenever there is a need consulting a physician instead of indulging in self medication.
5. Should often take breaks to keep themselves fit and relax their muscles, so that they can perform even better at their work.
6. Should take a nap if they have night shifts as the journey is too long.
7. Music is another technique which could relieve their stress and make them work with enthusiasm.
8. They should often take break and visit their home and spend time with them which could bring in new energy to work.
9. Technological modification of the vehicle like power steering, GPS system and others may ease the driving and improve the working conditions of truck drivers

Conclusion

The truck drivers play a vital part in our lives. If it was not for them we won't have got our goods delivered at the right time in the stores. To make the life of a truck driver more meaningful he should be included in the social security measures. He should be given insurance by the concerned company who hires him as he too has a family to look after. It is also important to see that the truck drivers have a healthy diet at every stop. It should be seen that there are outlets in petrol bunks for them to refill their trucks as well as they could purchase some healthy snacks for themselves. Therefore, it is important they are looked after by their company for a bright and better prospect in the Indian economy.

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