

Chapter 11

Experienced Stress and the Value of Rest Stops in the Transportation Field: Stress and Transportation

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ABSTRACT

Work-related stress has been a long-term research focus in the field of industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology. Transportation is marginal, but an interesting context for the study as the field contains many specific characteristics related to stress phenomena. This chapter investigates the contents of and connection between work-related stress and rest stops' value in the transportation field, specifically in a lightly settled area with long geographic distances. Professional truck drivers in Finland serve as the target group for this study. The working conditions of truck drivers are unique compared to other branches where the work is not so mobile. In addition to how the truck is equipped, the services and facilities at rest stops are important elements in wellbeing. Based on the qualitative content analysis, this study offers in-depth information concerning work-related stress as an experienced phenomenon in the transportation field. Work management and legislation are highlighted as primary results while a dangerous work environment as well as isolation and loneliness are listed as secondary research results associated with work-related stress and the value of rest stops. Recommendations for future research and practical implications are proposed.

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INTRODUCTION

Industrial–organizational (I-O) psychology is a relevant part of contemporary studies of the workplace. However, until recently, I-O psychology was neglected in, for example, psychology textbooks and courses (Maynard et al., 2002). The area was first labeled economic/business psychology, illustrating its link to business studies. In 1973, the field of I-O psychology was delineated by the American Psychological Association (Stryker et al., 2012). Since the 1980s, the Scandinavian focus on I-O psychology has rested on the physical and mental health of workers and the relationship between stress and mental health (Erez, 1994). According to the Four European Working Survey conducted in 2005, a total of one-fifth of European workers reported ill-health outcomes (Eurofound, 2007). In line with the survey, studies conducted by the likes of Hakanen (2008) and Belkić (2004, 2008), to mention a few, have covered topics such as work engagement and the relationship between occupational stress and cardiovascular disease.

In Finland, I-O psychology is often referred to as work and organizational psychology (WO), and it has a long tradition in the country. Research topics have mostly been negatively driven—such as work-related stress and burnout (e.g., Mauno, 2012), but since the turn of the millennium, positive issues such as work engagement have also gained momentum. In addition, the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) has actively studied and promoted well-being at work.

According to Katzell and Austin (1992), I-O psychology is a dynamic field that has made contributions to both the science of behavior and to industrial society. However, they pointed to a disjunction between theory and practice as a problem of I-O psychology (Katzell & Austin, 1992). To address this issue, the present chapter combines practical experiences and theory with a focus on one industry: transportation. In other words, this chapter considers transportation and the I-O psychology of professional truck drivers. Work in the transportation sector has several specific features, which have effects on the health and wellbeing of the drivers. In particular, the workplace is mobile, such that how trucks are equipped affects the wellbeing of drivers. Another factor influencing the wellbeing of these professional drivers involves the services offered at rest stops (see, e.g., Pandi-Perumal, 2006).

Epistemologically, this study concentrates on work-related stress as an experienced phenomenon focusing on the contents of and connections between the work-related stress and rest stops' value in the transportation field. Specifically, the emphasis is on lightly settled areas with long geographic distances. As an example of such an area, the study considers truck drivers working in Finland. The approaches to stress within the chosen empirical context are discussed below.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-related stress has been addressed abundantly in the organizational context. It has been concluded through numerous studies that prolonged and intense stress can create negative effects on people's mental and physical health (Johnson et al., 2005). Stress occurs when an employee experiences a demand (or a threat) that exceeds his or her abilities to successfully cope with it (Colligan & Higgins, 2005). This results in problems for one's psychological balance. An employee's response to stress has a direct relation to the characteristics of that specific situation.

Work-related stress and wellbeing research has emphasized the high-tech field (e.g., Moen et al., 2016) on the one hand, and social professions, particularly health care (e.g., Dendaas, 2011), on the other. However, research has also focused on professional drivers as an example of a high-strain occupation with

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