



The connection between the hassles–burnout relationship, as moderated by coping, and aberrant behaviors and health problems among bus drivers

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ABSTRACT

Driving a bus is a stressful job, and may result in aberrant behaviors or health problems. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of bus driver burnout on aberrant behaviors and health problems, as well as the role of self-criticism and confrontive and reappraisal coping as moderator variables in the hassle–burnout relationship. A self-administered questionnaire was designed to collect empirical data from bus drivers working at a Taiwanese motor transport company. The results confirm that burnout has a significantly positive relationship with both health problems and aberrant driving behaviors. In addition, although self-criticism positively moderates the relationship between job hassles and burnout, confrontive and reappraisal coping negatively moderate it.

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1. Introduction

Traffic accidents are usually caused by a concatenation of events, including aberrant driving behaviors, and a poor transportation environment (Kontogiannis et al., 2002). Aberrant driving behaviors, which are those that deviate from normal ones, such as traffic violations, acts of social disregard and lapses in judgment or concentration, become even more important when public safety can be affected by driver behaviors at work. Past studies have focused on understanding various aberrant driving behaviors and their relationships with the risk of road accidents (Reason et al., 1990; Parker et al., 1995; Aberg and Rimmo, 1998). While the errors and violations of bus drivers are seen as being related to work stress (Kontogiannis, 2006), few studies directly address this relationship, let alone consider possible countermeasures to reduce the incidence of aberrant driving behaviors among these drivers.

Driving a bus is often stressful, and may result in negative job outcomes or health problems (e.g., Chen and Cunradi, 2008; Raggatt, 1991). Here, health refers to the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. The job demands–resources (JD-R) model has clearly expanded on earlier health models of the *job demand–burnout–health problems* path in the workplace (e.g., Demerouti et al., 2001; Lewig et al., 2007). Job hassles for drivers refer to the job demand stressors arising from traffic, passengers, vehicles, colleagues, hours, and schedule, which may have

adverse effects because they are uncontrollable, frequent, and largely impervious to individual coping efforts (Evans et al., 1999). Increasing the understanding of the role of various coping mechanisms on the relations between job hassles and burnout can help identify the coping skills that are effective in reducing burnout (Evans et al., 2004), which in turn may improve personal health (e.g., Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Hakanen et al., 2006; Pienaar and Willemse, 2008) and reduce aberrant driving behaviors, thus increasing road safety.

High levels of aberrant behaviors and health problems among employees are costly for both organizations and individuals. Despite the well-documented relationship between driver stress and health problems (Tse et al., 2006), our understanding of the intervening variables (e.g., coping) in the process through which work stressors affect work-related outcomes is limited. To address this gap in the current literature, this research aims to develop a relationship model that incorporates the main consequences (aberrant behaviors and health problems) of bus driver burnout, and explores the moderating effects of coping on the hassle–burnout relationship. Understanding the interrelationships among these variables may provide more insight into effective stress management and coping strategies, specifically with regard to bus drivers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Job hassle and burnout

Hassle refers to the more minor but incessant day-to-day demands of daily life, which appear to affect health and well-being

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to a greater degree than do major life events (De Longis et al., 1982; Evans et al., 1999). Burnout is a potential response to the emotional stress of working with others who are troubled (Everall and Paulson, 2004). Moreover, stressors have generally been identified as environmental conditions that adversely affect health, while strains refer to the individual responses to these (e.g., Jex et al., 1992). Therefore, job hassle is regarded as a job demand stressor in this work, and burnout symptoms are job strains caused by stressors. On the whole, the relationship between job stressors and strains has been well-documented (e.g., Beehr, 1985; Wallace et al., 2010). For example, Devereux et al. (2009) indicated that perceived work demand stressors are positive predictors of burnout, while work demand stressors have significant effects on burnout (Wallace et al., 2010). On the other hand, job hassles for bus drivers refer to problems related to traffic, passengers, vehicles, colleagues, hours, and schedules. The most common bus driver hassles are problems with equipment, passengers, and road conditions (Chen and Cunradi, 2008), and much of the focus of burnout research has been on individuals who work in the human services field (Wallace et al., 2010). In this respect, passengers often put pressure on drivers by burdening them with questions, requests, and demands, and job hassles because of passenger behaviors are thus clearly important as predictors of burnout among bus drivers.

In previous studies of work stress, the most widely used framework that identifies the salient dimensions of job conditions for workers is the job demand–control (JD-C) model (Karasek, 1990). Based on the JD-C model, Demerouti et al. (2001) proposed the job demands–resources (JD-R) model, which expanded earlier models of the *job demand–burnout–health problems* path in the workplace. A combination of high job demand stressors (e.g., high work-load, emotional demands, and role conflicts) and low job resources (e.g., autonomy, social support, and feedback) can lead to joint events that cause burnout (Bakker et al., 2006). Burnout is thus treated as a consequence derived from stressful work conditions (e.g., excessive work demands), and is a syndrome consisting of feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of professional accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). Previous studies indicated that exhaustion and cynicism are the most important components of burnout for workers (Maslach et al., 2001; Lewig et al., 2007), and thus in this study burnout is regarded as a bus driver's feelings of exhaustion and cynicism.

Therefore, the first hypothesis in this study is as follows.

H1. Job hassle is positively related to burnout.

2.2. Coping

Coping refers to the ways in which individuals choose to respond to stressful situations (Welbourne et al., 2007). Two main types of coping have been proposed in the literature: problem-focused coping, which is related to changing the person–environment transaction, and emotion-based coping, which refers to attempts to regulate the emotions (Latack and Havlovic, 1992). However, based on Matthews et al.'s (1996) research on driver stress, coping could be recognized as operating in two directions, that is, adaptive and maladaptive coping. More specifically, confrontive coping is linked to violations, errors, and loss of safety. Emotion-focused coping refers to strategies of self-criticism and worry, which may lead to cognitive interference that distracts the driver (e.g., criticizing oneself for making mistakes). Furthermore, reappraisal coping is associated with positive cognitions of the driving experience (e.g., viewing driving as a learning experience) (Matthews et al., 1996). In sum, reappraisal responses appear to be the most adaptive, while confrontive and emotion-focused coping appear to be the most maladaptive (Machin and Hoare, 2008).

Within this cognitive-behavioral theory, coping is defined as the “cognitive and behavioral efforts a person makes to manage demands that tax or exceed his or her personal resources” (Lazarus, 1991, p. 5). Stress occurs when the demands of a situation tax or exceed the person's resources to cope with it (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In support of the JD-R or JD-C models, Wallace et al. (2010) found that the job demand variables increase burnout, while the resource or control ones (e.g., active coping strategies) help to reduce job demand variables, thereby helping to decrease the feeling of burnout. Specifically, emotional coping (e.g., by venting and humor) positively moderates the relationship between role ambiguity and burnout, while active coping strategies negatively moderate the relationship between workload and burnout (Wallace et al., 2010). Moreover, Betoret (2006) indicated that individuals with a high level of coping resources reported suffering less stress and burnout than those with fewer coping resources, and thus coping may moderate the influence of stressors on burnout.

In the context of the motor transport industry, Matthews et al. (1996) indicated that confrontive and emotion-focused coping are maladaptive coping methods that are associated with more negative outcomes. In a study of 159 Australian bus drivers, the workload (i.e., the hours spent driving) was found to be a significant predictor of the drivers' need for recovery (i.e., fatigue), and coping was shown to mediate the influence of workload on positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA), as well as physical symptoms (Machin and Hoare, 2008). Moreover, long driving hours and passenger complaints have been shown to lead to maladaptive coping behaviors (e.g., speeding and stimulant use) among coach drivers, which in turn result in stress symptoms, such as health complaints, fatigue, and job dissatisfaction (Raggatt, 1991). Finally, Kontogiannis's (2006) study on the coping behaviors of Greek drivers provided evidence that confrontive coping has a significant and positive correlation with drivers' aberrant behaviors.

Parkes (1994) suggested that personal characteristics, such as coping, can mediate or moderate relations between job demand stressors and job strains (e.g., burnout symptoms). The various methods of coping may thus play different roles in the hassle–burnout relationship. For example, Chen and Cunradi's (2008) study on the coping behaviors of urban transit operators provided evidence that disengage–deny and escape coping significantly mediate the relationship between job hassle and burnout symptoms. However, the relationship between stressors and strains is thought to be stronger for those individuals with low levels of adaptive coping, while emotional coping positively moderates the stressor–burnout relationship (e.g., Wallace et al., 2010), and effective coping may play an important role in reducing the levels job hassle and burnout. This study is innovative in that it identifies the functions of self-criticism and confrontive and reappraisal coping as moderating factors in the relationship between hassle and driver burnout. Therefore, the three hypotheses examined this study are as follows.

H2a. Reappraisal coping moderates the relationship between job hassles and burnout.

H2b. Confrontive coping moderates the relationship between job hassles and burnout.

H2c. Self-criticism moderates the relationship between job hassles and burnout.

2.3. Burnout and job outcomes

As stated previously, the JD-R model expanded earlier models of the *job demand–burnout–health problems* path in the workplace. Specifically, high job demands and poor resources have been shown to lead to burnout, which in turn impairs health, in four

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