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Driving through demands: How self-efficacy shapes the impact of job stress on private bus drivers in India

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between various job demands namely, quantitative demands, work pace, emotional demands, and the demand to suppress emotions and their psychological and job-related effects, including stress, depressive symptoms, and job satisfaction, among private bus drivers in North India. A sample of 300 drivers was surveyed using a Hindi-translated version of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS to test the proposed research hypotheses. The findings highlight the significant moderating role of self-efficacy in this context. Specifically, self-efficacy was found to positively influence job satisfaction while mitigating levels of stress and depressive symptoms. Furthermore, job demands exhibited a substantial impact on the respondents, which was notably moderated by their self-efficacy levels. The study offers both practical and theoretical contributions by providing insights that can help bus operators develop targeted interventions to enhance driver well-being and job performance. Limitations of the study and directions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: Depressive symptoms and job satisfaction, job demand, job stress, private bus driver, self-efficacy.

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1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of road infrastructure in India has led to a significant increase in the demand for transportation services, placing immense pressure on the transport system. While public bus services are provided by the government in select urban areas, a vast majority of cities, towns, suburban regions, and rural areas rely heavily on private transport operators to meet daily mobility needs.

According to Jiang et al. [1], a key focus of human resource management is to identify mechanisms that influence overall performance through strategic practices. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of individual characteristics in predicting performance [2], with self-efficacy emerging as a critical determinant of employee success [3]. An effective human resource management system maximizes the potential of both organizational strategies and individual capabilities to achieve collective goals. Mental and psychological factors have also gained attention as essential contributors to workforce performance [4].

In such a competitive and demanding environment, bus drivers often experience elevated stress levels, which can severely impact their efficiency and productivity. Stress among drivers may arise from various sources- irregular work shifts, unhealthy eating habits, poor nutrition, congested traffic, extended driving hours, constant alertness, and operating vehicles in harsh weather conditions [5]. Bus driving is recognized as a moderately to highly strenuous occupation, posing risks to both physical and mental well-being and consequently reducing driver productivity.

Bus drivers are responsible not only for safe transportation but also for maintaining strict schedules, making the role particularly demanding. Age also plays a significant role in performance, with younger drivers typically associated with higher accident rates compared to their middle-aged and older counterparts [6]. Moreover, emotional labor has been found to drain personal psychological resources such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, energy, and optimism, which in turn negatively affect job engagement and satisfaction [7].

Private bus drivers in India operate under challenging work conditions that include navigating congested roads, dealing with unruly passengers, coping with weather-related difficulties, and adhering to tight schedules. For example, drivers in districts like Aurangabad often face difficulties such as narrow roads and extended routes through multiple villages. Despite these challenges and the high-stress nature of their job, formal education is not a requirement for becoming a private bus driver. In India, there are twelve identified categories of job roles for private bus drivers, as illustrated in Table 1.

However, there remains a lack of empirical research on the moderating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between job demands and their psychological and occupational effects on bus drivers. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how self-efficacy influences the impact of job demands on stress, depressive symptoms, and job satisfaction among private bus drivers in India.

Table 1.
Job descriptions of Indian private bus driver.

Sr. No.	Job Descriptions for Bus Drivers
1	No certified education is compulsory for private bus drivers, but state or large transport corporations need a 7 th or 8 th class pass.
2	HPMV (Heavy Passenger Motor Vehicle) driving license is essential for bus drivers.
3	No availability of formal log entry only vocal communication is available for the problems.
4	In case of an accident, information must reach the bus operator or police.
5	Drivers must have knowledge of the controlled use of multiple limbs based on observations.
6	Normal functioning of arms and legs of drivers.
7	Boarding and deboarding of passengers at designated locations.
8	Follow a deliberate direction according to a timetable.
9	Must understand and follow traffic laws by state and central regulatory authorities.
10	Understand and Follow measures to confirm passengers' safety.
11	Complete basic maintenance (check the bus tires, breaks, lights, and oil etc.)
12	Maintain order and safety on the bus.

Source: Bus Driver's Job Description [8].

1.1. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is considered one of the core personality traits essential for personal and professional development. Higher levels of self-efficacy in individuals are closely linked to enhanced well-being, increased efficiency, and improved overall functioning. According to Bandura [9], individuals with strong self-efficacy tend to foster positive thinking patterns. When applied within a professional stress framework, this theory suggests that higher self-efficacy reduces job-related stress and contributes to greater life satisfaction, career success, and better health outcomes.

Individuals with high self-efficacy are typically more disciplined, goal-oriented, self-aware, and focused. In contrast, those with low self-efficacy often display traits such as disorganization, lack of discipline, inconsistency, and carelessness. As a result, self-efficacy is regarded as one of the most empowering personality traits in the field of positive psychology.

1.2. Job Demands

Job demands refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that require sustained effort and are associated with certain physiological and psychological costs. Bakker and Demerouti [10] introduced a widely recognized model that assesses occupational stress by examining the interplay between job demands and decision-making

autonomy. A key insight from this model is that high job demands combined with low decision latitude can lead to elevated levels of psychological stress, ultimately contributing to job dissatisfaction.

Supporting this, Karasek [11] found an inverse relationship between job stress and job satisfaction, indicating that increased job stress typically corresponds with lower levels of satisfaction in the workplace.

Sullivan and Bhagat [12] emphasized that bus drivers must maintain a dual focus: ensuring passenger well-being while simultaneously concentrating on the act of driving. This dual responsibility highlights the critical importance of both physical and mental health in influencing a driver's performance. Any form of impairment, whether physical or psychological, can lead to serious consequences for passengers and compromise road safety. In a related study, Valarmathi [13] explored the concept of job crafting, which includes seeking additional resources, embracing challenges, and reducing job demands and found it to be an effective way of enhancing person-job fit.

1.3. Stress

Stress is a common psychological response experienced when an individual feels overwhelmed by external demands and is unable to cope effectively. While occasional stress is a natural part of life, prolonged or unmanaged stress can develop into a chronic condition. The environmental factors that trigger stress responses are known as stressors, which may include loud noises, hostile interactions, or demanding workloads.

In the context of bus driving, stress encompasses a broad range of physical and psychological health issues, including hypertension, cardiovascular problems, and mental health disorders [14]. Given the high-responsibility nature of the job, bus drivers are particularly vulnerable to stress-related health complications.

Various strategies have been proposed for managing occupational stress, such as fostering a supportive work environment and implementing effective organizational practices. Ravindran and Ahmed [15] examined the relationship between occupational stress, employee well-being, and organizational commitment. Their findings revealed that organizational stressors significantly contribute to both physical and psychological ill health, while also diminishing employees' commitment to their organizations. Notably, stress related to job insecurity was found to adversely affect both mental and physical health.

1.4. Depressive Symptoms

Depressive symptoms are a widespread and serious mental health concern that can significantly impair psychological well-being. Depression is characterized by a persistent sense of sadness and a diminished interest or pleasure in activities that were once enjoyable. It can lead to a range of emotional and physical complications and often hinders an individual's ability to perform effectively in various aspects of life [16].

1.5. Job Satisfaction

The American Psychiatric Association [17] defined job satisfaction as a set of emotional responses individuals have toward their job roles. It is a key factor in motivating employees and encouraging higher levels of performance. Vroom [18] described job satisfaction as a combined result of psychological, physiological, and environmental conditions that prompt employees to express contentment with their work. In contemporary workplaces, Hoppok and Spielgler [19] highlighted the importance of maintaining employee satisfaction, noting that dissatisfied employees are likely to underperform and face dismissal, which in turn increases recruitment and training costs for organizations. Consequently, it is in a company's best interest to cultivate a supportive work environment where employees feel heard, valued, and integral to the organization's functioning.

1.6. Rationale of the Study

Bus drivers are frequently exposed to stressful working conditions that pose significant risks to their physical and mental health. Their daily responsibilities involve long and strenuous hours, often under hazardous conditions such as overcrowded roads during peak hours. Despite these challenges, limited research has been conducted on the health and occupational issues faced by bus drivers in specific regions, including the Aurangabad District of Bihar. This study aims to address this gap by examining the relationship between job demands and their effects, with a focus on the moderating role of self-efficacy among private bus drivers in the region.

2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Drawing from the existing body of literature, a conceptual framework has been developed to explore the relationship between job demands- specifically, quantitative demands, work pace, emotional demands, and the need to suppress emotions- and their outcomes, namely stress, depressive symptoms, and job satisfaction. This framework is illustrated in Figure 1. The proposed model aims to investigate job demands as predictors of stress, depressive symptoms, and job satisfaction, while also assessing the moderating role of self-efficacy. In addition, this study examines how self-efficacy interacts with various demographic characteristics of private bus drivers in India.

The empirical research was carried out at the Aurangabad District Bus Depot in Bihar, where a total of 350 private bus drivers participated. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that included sociodemographic information along with the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ). The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software to test the proposed hypotheses.

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: There is a significant relationship between job demands and their effects (stress, depressive symptoms, and job satisfaction).

H₂: Self-efficacy has a significant effect on job demands and their associated outcomes.

H₃: Self-efficacy moderates the relationship between job demands (independent variable) and their effects (dependent variables).

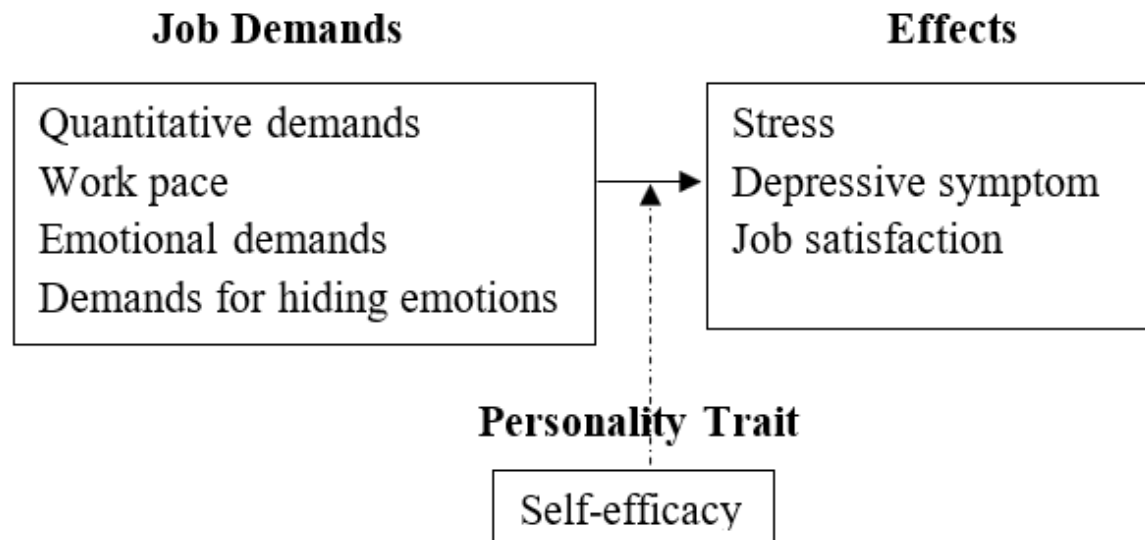


Figure 1.
Conceptual Framework of the Study.

This model is grounded in the Demand-Control-Support (DCS) model proposed by Clark [20] and Karasek and Theorell [21]. According to this framework, job demands exert a direct influence on stress, depressive symptoms, and job satisfaction. Furthermore, individual differences- particularly personality traits such as self-efficacy- are believed to moderate the relationship between job demands and their outcomes. It is posited that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy possess greater resilience and are more adept at managing challenges compared to those with lower self-efficacy. As such, it is expected that individuals with strong self-efficacy are better equipped to handle both occupational and personal demands.

This study introduces an integrated model to explore the relationship between job demands and their psychological and emotional effects among private bus drivers in India. It also examines the moderating role of the personality trait self-efficacy within these relationships. A descriptive survey design was employed, and data were collected using the Hindi-translated version of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire II (long version).

3. Findings

Individual personality plays a crucial role in occupational decision-making. This study confirms that self-efficacy significantly moderates the relationship between job demands and their outcomes. The research hypotheses were formulated based on an extensive review of previous literature and were empirically tested through this study. The primary objective was to assess levels of stress, depressive symptoms, and job satisfaction among private bus drivers, while also evaluating how job demands and self-efficacy influence their job performance.

To examine the proposed model, data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results revealed that stress and depressive symptoms negatively impact job satisfaction and overall job performance among private bus drivers. Conversely, self-efficacy was found to have a positive effect on both job satisfaction and job performance.

These findings suggest that bus operators must view these outcomes as a strategic opportunity to enhance driver performance by addressing factors that hinder job satisfaction and efficiency. Positive job performance not only contributes to goal achievement but also enhances drivers' self-confidence and overall workplace satisfaction.

In comparison to many other professions, private bus drivers are more susceptible to occupational stress due to conflicting demands. These include ensuring passenger safety, managing unpredictable and often difficult passengers, adhering to traffic regulations, maintaining work-life balance, and handling unexpected incidents such as accidents. Job insecurity emerged as a major source of stress. Additionally, many respondents reported challenges in managing diverse passenger behaviors.

From a health perspective, drivers frequently suffer from physical ailments such as piles, attributed to prolonged sitting and engine heat. The study also identified a significant relationship between age and factors such as work hazards, job demands, and psychological challenges. Furthermore, years of experience were found to be significantly associated with stressors, work hazards, job demands, and psychological issues.

In summary, this research provides valuable insights and a robust empirical assessment of the proposed theoretical model.

4. Suggestions and Recommendations

To enhance the performance of bus drivers, it is essential that they receive consistent and meaningful support from their employers. A supportive management approach can significantly boost a driver's performance, even under challenging or unfavorable working conditions.

It is recommended that bus operators implement regular stress audits across all levels of their workforce. These audits will help identify specific stress-inducing aspects of the job and allow for targeted interventions to address them effectively. Proactive measures based on such assessments can contribute to improved job satisfaction, reduced stress levels, and overall better performance among private bus drivers.

5. Practical Implications

This study offers both academic and practical contributions. While numerous studies have explored the relationship between job demands and their effects, this research goes a step further by examining the underlying mechanisms of that relationship, specifically, the moderating role of self-efficacy. The findings contribute to the development of theoretical frameworks that connect personality traits, particularly self-efficacy, with job demands and their outcomes.

From a practical standpoint, personality traits should be considered a key factor during the recruitment process of bus drivers, as self-efficacy has emerged as a critical predictor of how well individuals cope with occupational stress. The study revealed that job-related strain significantly impacts drivers' mental and physical health, but this effect is moderated by the level of self-efficacy. Drivers with lower levels of self-efficacy may be more vulnerable to stress and, therefore, should be carefully evaluated during the selection process.

By employing a survey-based methodology, this research provides a deeper, individual-level understanding of stress among private bus drivers. It highlights the persistent and harmful nature of occupational stress, which continues to threaten drivers' psychological well-being and overall quality of life.

This study also assessed the overall stress levels and their contributing factors among private bus drivers, thereby enriching academic knowledge in this field. On a practical level, the findings can inform strategies and interventions that benefit both the drivers and bus operators, ultimately contributing to a healthier, more efficient workforce and improved service delivery.

6. Future Scope of Research and Limitations

In addition to the practical and academic implications, this study also presents certain limitations and opportunities for future research. Since the model was tested exclusively on a sample of private bus drivers, the findings cannot be readily generalized to state-run bus drivers or other categories of commercial drivers. Therefore, there exists a substantial scope for testing this model across different types of bus drivers, including those working in public transportation.

Future studies should consider examining additional variables that might influence job satisfaction and performance among bus drivers, such as organizational support, work-life balance, or cultural factors. The proposed model could also be tested in different geographic regions, including urban centers, townships, or rural areas, to assess the impact of location on job-related outcomes.

Moreover, this study was limited by a relatively small sample size, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to broader populations. Future research should aim to include larger and more diverse samples of Indian private bus drivers to increase the robustness and external validity of the findings.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights and a strong empirical foundation for further investigation into the role of personality traits particularly self-efficacy in moderating the relationship between job demands and occupational outcomes. The results can guide both scholars and practitioners in designing more effective strategies to support driver well-being and job performance.

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