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PROFESSIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF STRESS RESILIENCE AMONG PUBLIC TRANSPORT DRIVERS: THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICT BEHAVIOR AND OCCUPATIONAL STATE

Ruzimatova Gulbakhor
Doctoral Student at Tashkent State Transport University
ruzimatovagulbahor63@gmail.com
Gulim1301@inbox.ru

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the professional and psychological determinants of stress resilience among public transport drivers from the perspective of an integrated theoretical and empirical research framework. Professional driving is characterized by a high level of responsibility, time pressure, intensive information processing, rapidly changing traffic conditions, continuous interaction with passengers, and frequent exposure to potentially conflictual situations. Accordingly, stress resilience is conceptualized not merely as resistance to emotional strain, but as a psychological resource that enables drivers to maintain functional stability, regulate their behavioral responses, and perform professional duties safely under demanding occupational conditions. The study proposes an empirical model focusing on the relationships between stress resilience, behavioral strategies in conflict situations, and occupational psychological states. The study sample comprises 305 public transport drivers working in Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara. The proposed framework provides a basis for examining drivers' stress resilience as a dynamic outcome of the interaction between psychological resources and occupational demands.

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Keywords: *public transport drivers, stress resilience, occupational stress, conflict behavior, coping strategies, emotional strain, occupational state, road safety.*

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Introduction

The sustainable functioning of modern urban public transport systems largely depends on the human factor. Although technically reliable vehicles and well-developed road infrastructure are essential prerequisites for safe passenger transportation, the functional and psychological state of the driver remains one of the most important components of the overall transport system. In public transport in particular, drivers are responsible not only for operating a vehicle but also for ensuring the safety of a large number of passengers.

The psychological complexity of professional driving is determined by the need to perform several tasks simultaneously. Drivers continuously monitor the road environment, anticipate the behavior of other road users, comply with time schedules, make rapid decisions, and manage passenger-related communication situations. Such multidimensional occupational activity requires the continuous mobilization of cognitive, emotional, and regulatory resources.

When occupational demands remain intensive over extended periods, psychological resources may become depleted, increasing the likelihood of emotional strain, fatigue, irritability, and reduced behavioral self-control. Therefore, interpreting stress resilience among public transport drivers merely as the ability to "withstand" stress considerably narrows the psychological meaning of this construct. Stress resilience also encompasses the capacity to maintain psychological equilibrium, adequately assess challenging situations, regulate emotional and behavioral responses, and continue performing professional duties safely under stressful conditions.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Stress is regarded in contemporary psychology as a multidimensional phenomenon associated with an individual's adaptation to environments characterized by complex and demanding conditions. Selye (1976) conceptualized stress as a general adaptive response of the organism to various internal and external demands. Although this approach provides an important foundation for understanding the physiological mechanisms of stress, explaining stress in occupational settings also requires consideration of an individual's subjective appraisal of the situation and the strategies used to respond to it.

According to the transactional model developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is not simply a direct consequence of an external stimulus; rather, it emerges from the interaction between the individual and the environment. The manner in which individuals evaluate situational demands in relation to their available resources influences the nature and intensity of their stress responses. The coping concept proposed by these authors refers to cognitive and behavioral efforts aimed at managing stressful demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to public transport drivers because traffic congestion, time pressure, passenger conflicts, and hazardous road situations may be appraised differently by different drivers and consequently generate different psychological responses.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model, developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), also provides an important theoretical framework for understanding occupational stress. According to this model, high job demands continuously consume employees' physical and psychological resources, whereas adequate occupational and social resources can mitigate their adverse effects. In the occupational context of public transport drivers, intensive workload, strict adherence to timetables, complex traffic conditions, responsibility for passenger safety, and communication-related strain may function as significant job demands.

Previous research on occupational stress among public transport drivers demonstrates the distinctive stressogenic characteristics of this profession. Tse et al. (2006), in their review of several decades of research on bus driver well-being, identified work schedules, time pressure, traffic conditions, passenger interactions, and limited control over work activities as important factors influencing drivers' health and psychological well-being.

Machin and Hoare (2008) investigated workload and coping styles among bus drivers and found that higher workload was associated with a greater need for recovery and more negative psychological outcomes. Their findings indicate that the consequences of occupational stressors depend not only on external working conditions but also on the coping strategies employed by drivers (Machin & Hoare, 2008). This provides a rationale for examining stress resilience through the interaction between occupational demands and the driver's psychological capacity to manage them.

Useche et al. (2017) investigated the relationships among work-related psychosocial stress factors, fatigue, and risky driving behavior among public transport drivers. Their findings demonstrated that fatigue played an important mediating role in the relationship between occupational strain, social support, and risky driving behavior (Useche et al., 2017). These results suggest that drivers' psychological and functional states are closely related to road safety.

Yamada et al. (2008) examined the psychological conditions of bus drivers and their relationship with passenger-related accidents, reporting that stress reactions among drivers may be associated with

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disruptions in safe driving performance. The authors also highlighted recognition and social support from others as psychological resources capable of buffering the adverse effects of occupational stress (Yamada et al., 2008).

Nakai and Ogawa (2014) identified several important stressors among bus drivers, including anger toward unsafe road users, passenger complaints, time pressure, anxiety about possible accidents, and inappropriate passenger behavior. Strong stress reactions were also associated with adverse behavioral manifestations, including cognitive failures, abrupt acceleration or deceleration, and aggressive driving tendencies (Nakai & Ogawa, 2014). These findings underline the practical importance of developing emotional self-regulation skills among professional drivers.

The work of public transport drivers differs from many other forms of professional driving because it involves continuous interpersonal interaction with passengers. Passenger complaints, timetable delays, overcrowding, and other conflict situations arising during transportation may create additional emotional strain. Therefore, behavioral strategies adopted in conflict situations may constitute an important manifestation of drivers' stress resilience.

Thomas (1992) explains conflict behavior in terms of the extent to which individuals seek to satisfy their own interests and those of the other party. This framework distinguishes several principal conflict-handling strategies, including competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating (Thomas, 1992). In the professional activities of public transport drivers, these strategies may be reflected in the ways conflicts with passengers, other drivers, or other participants in the occupational environment are managed. Importantly, a particular conflict strategy should not automatically be classified as universally "positive" or "negative"; rather, its appropriateness should be evaluated in relation to the specific situational context.

Prolonged exposure to occupational stress may also affect drivers' professional and emotional states. Maslach et al. (1996) conceptualize occupational burnout as a psychological syndrome associated with chronic interpersonal and occupational stressors. Emotional exhaustion, psychological distancing from recipients of one's work, and changes in perceived professional efficacy constitute important dimensions of this phenomenon (Maslach et al., 1996). Given the continuous communicative demands and high level of responsibility inherent in public transport driving, examining these indicators in relation to stress resilience has considerable scientific relevance.

Chen and Sih (2024) found that stressors such as workload, time pressure, and job insecurity were associated with emotional exhaustion among public transport drivers. Emotional exhaustion, in turn, was related to lower job satisfaction and increased risky driving behavior (Chen & Sih, 2024). These findings support the need to analyze occupational stress, psychological state, and driving behavior within an integrated conceptual framework.

Kompier (1996) identified high job demands, limited control over work activities, and insufficient social support as significant psychosocial risk factors among professional bus drivers. The author emphasized that occupational stress prevention should not be restricted to improving drivers' individual adaptation capacities; rather, interventions should also address work organization, work–rest schedules, the social work environment, and management practices (Kompier, 1996).

Taken together, the existing literature suggests that stress resilience among public transport drivers should not be viewed as an isolated or static psychological trait. Instead, it may be conceptualized as a complex psychological system integrating the appraisal of occupational stressors, regulation of emotional strain, selection of appropriate behavioral strategies in conflict situations, and maintenance of a functional occupational state (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Machin & Hoare, 2008; Nakai & Ogawa, 2014; Useche et al., 2017). From this perspective, an empirical examination of the relationships among stress resilience, conflict behavior strategies, and occupational state may provide an important basis for identifying psychological mechanisms that support the professional stability of public transport drivers.

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CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE STUDY

Based on the theoretical analysis presented above, stress resilience among public transport drivers may be examined at three interrelated levels.

The first level is stress resilience, which reflects the driver's capacity to maintain psychological equilibrium and functional readiness under demanding occupational conditions.

The second level comprises behavioral strategies in conflict situations. This dimension reflects the behavioral patterns selected by drivers when interpersonal tension arises. Within the proposed framework, conflict behavior may be regarded as one of the observable manifestations of stress regulation in actual communication situations.

The third level is the occupational psychological state, which reflects how prolonged exposure to work-related demands is manifested in the driver's emotional and professional functioning. Emotional exhaustion, psychological distancing from work, and changes in professional satisfaction or efficacy may provide information regarding the preservation or depletion of psychological resources.

Accordingly, the conceptual logic of the study can be represented as follows:

Occupational stressors → Stress resilience → Conflict behavior strategies → Occupational state → Safe professional performance.

This model should not be interpreted as establishing a strictly unidirectional causal sequence. Rather, it represents a system of potentially reciprocal psychological relationships that should be empirically examined.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study is to empirically investigate the relationships among stress resilience, behavioral strategies in conflict situations, and occupational psychological states among public transport drivers.

The object of the study is the manifestation of stress resilience among public transport drivers. The study involved 305 public transport drivers: 115 drivers working in bus depots in Tashkent, 96 public transport drivers from Samarkand, and 94 public transport drivers from Bukhara.

Table 1

Distribution of the Study Sample by City

Location	***n***	**%**
Tashkent	115	37.7
Samarkand	96	31.5
Bukhara	94	30.8
Total	305	100.0

Note. Percentages were calculated from the reported sample size (N = 305).

The empirical study incorporates three principal diagnostic domains. The first is aimed at assessing drivers' levels of stress resilience. The second examines behavioral strategies in conflict situations on the basis of Thomas's (1992) conflict-handling framework. The third assesses indicators of occupational and emotional functioning using the conceptual framework developed by Maslach et al. (1996).

Descriptive statistics can be used to characterize the distribution of the principal study variables, while correlational analysis can determine the strength and direction of relationships among stress resilience, conflict behavior strategies, and occupational-state indicators. Where appropriate, between-group comparisons and regression analysis may also be applied to determine which variables demonstrate the strongest statistical associations with drivers' stress resilience.

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DISCUSSION

The proposed research framework moves beyond a simplified classification of public transport drivers according to “high” or “low” stress resilience. From an occupational psychology perspective, the more significant question is not whether drivers experience stress, but how their psychological and behavioral regulatory systems function when stress is present.

In this context, high stress resilience does not imply the complete absence of stress. A driver may experience emotional strain resulting from traffic congestion, time pressure, passenger dissatisfaction, or hazardous road situations while still maintaining the ability to regulate emotional responses, preserve attentional control, make appropriate decisions, and continue professional activities safely.

The inclusion of conflict behavior strategies in the research model is particularly important for this reason. In public transport settings, interpersonal conflict is not merely a phenomenon of social interaction. An intense conflict may divert the driver’s attention from traffic conditions, increase emotional arousal, and influence subsequent decision-making. Consequently, constructive conflict management may be regarded not only as a component of communicative competence but also as a psychological skill relevant to occupational safety.

Occupational psychological state represents a comparatively longer-term indicator of the consequences of repeated exposure to stress. When daily occupational demands consistently exceed opportunities for psychological recovery, emotional exhaustion and negative attitudes toward professional activity may gradually develop. Consequently, psychological interventions designed to strengthen stress resilience among public transport drivers should not be restricted to relaxation techniques. They should also incorporate emotional self-regulation, constructive conflict management, cognitive reappraisal of stressogenic situations, coping skills, and psychological recovery strategies.

CONCLUSION

Professional activity in public transport driving represents a complex occupational context in which high cognitive, emotional, communicative, and safety-related demands interact continuously. Therefore, stress resilience should be conceptualized not as a fixed individual characteristic but as a dynamic psychological and functional system activated under occupational demands and supported by available psychological resources.

The theoretical analysis indicates potential functional relationships among stress resilience, behavioral strategies in conflict situations, and occupational psychological states. Empirical investigation of these relationships in a sample of 305 public transport drivers may contribute to a more precise understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying professional stability in this occupational group.

The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using the findings to develop psychologically grounded interventions aimed at strengthening stress resilience, improving constructive conflict management, reducing emotional strain, and facilitating occupational recovery among public transport drivers. Such interventions may contribute not only to drivers’ psychological well-being but also to the prevention of transport risks associated with the human factor.

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