

LIVES BEHIND THE WHEELS: ACCIDENT PRONE DRIVING BEHAVIORS OF BUS DRIVERS AND STRUCTURAL FACTORS WITHIN SOCIO-CULTURAL AND WORKING CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Road traffic accident problems are not only a major global problem but also a local problem in Myanmar. Bus accidents constitute about 10% of the total of traffic accidents in Myanmar. Bus drivers are prone to accidents, and their driving behaviors are greatly influenced by their everyday working and living contexts.

This research was to characterize the accident prone driving experiences of bus drivers and to explain how the sociocultural and structural factors within the working and living conditions influenced the accident prone driving behaviors of bus drivers. A Critical Medical Anthropology perspective was used as the framework of the study. A qualitative research method was used and the methods utilized for data collection were open-ended in-depth interviews and participant observation. 12 informants, who are bus drivers, and 3 key informants, who are managers, were selected through a purposive sampling method, available documents such as journals, news, local and international documents were reviewed as data sources.

Findings reveal differences in accident prone driving behaviors of Myanmar bus drivers; speeding, driving in the wrong lane, not stopping at appropriate places, or drinking or using drugs that occurred as a part of their daily work patterns, which, in turn, influenced working and living conditions. Poor working conditions, lack of safety equipment, a competitive driving atmosphere, complex road patterns, low career status, tight schedules, varied job payment systems, fixed amount of trips combined with the amount of individual operating cost, inadequate rest, lack of days off and long working hours, no support from management, social interaction with passengers and other road users, poor living conditions, not sleeping regularly, frequent skipping meals, and a lack of family support coupled with other family burdens were factors that had a huge influence on their driving behaviors. Thus, these structural factors are considered predisposing factors to the accident prone driving behaviors of Myanmar bus drivers.

It is, therefore, necessary to establish policies to prevent traffic accidents by reducing accident prone driving behaviors of bus drivers, which requires collaboration from all institutional sectors such as work, family and government sectors. A non-competitive driving atmosphere, an efficient administrative and supportive working structure, should also be adopted.

KEY WORDS: ACCIDENT PRONE DRIVING BEHAVIOR/ STRUCTURAL FACTORS/ WORKING CONDITION/ LIVING CONDITION

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