Occupational Stress Factors Among Driving Instructors in a Malaysian Driving School

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ABSTRACT

Occupational stress is a significant issue that affects employee well-being and organizational performance across various sectors, particularly in professions requiring high concentration and responsibility such as driving instruction. This study investigates the key factors contributing to workplace stress among employees in a Malaysian driving school, with a focus on how these stressors impact productivity, mental health, and job satisfaction. A quantitative research design was adopted, utilizing a structured questionnaire adapted from the Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI) to gather data from 25 employees, including driving instructors and support staff. The study identified six major stress domains: workload, financial pressure, work environment, age-related issues, family responsibilities, and managerial support. Among these, workload emerged as the most significant source of stress, followed by environmental discomfort and financial strain. Although family related stress was rated the lowest, a majority of respondents still reported difficulties in balancing work and personal life. The findings highlight the importance of proactive stress management strategies, including improved workload distribution, better communication, financial wellness programs, and supportive leadership. These measures are essential for creating a healthier work environment and enhancing the effectiveness of driver training, which has broader implications for public safety and road user education.

Keywords: Workplace stress; driving instructors; occupational stress; and employee well-being

INTRODUCTION

Workplace stress has been increasingly acknowledged as a significant factor affecting employee health, productivity, and organizational performance. In professions that demand high concentration and responsibility, such as driving instruction, stress can be particularly pronounced. The mismatch between job demands and an employee's capacity to respond effectively often results in adverse physical, emotional, and mental consequences. In Malaysia, although road safety remains a national concern, limited attention has been given to the working conditions and stress levels experienced by driving instructors. These professionals, who serve as the first formal educators in road safety for novice drivers, operate under conditions that may adversely affect their performance and, consequently, public safety.

Stress is an omnipresent phenomenon that is frequently encountered and has become an inherent part of human existence. Within the context of employment, job-related stress has emerged as one of the most critical factors adversely impacting individuals' overall health and well-being. Negative stress whether psychological, physical, or emotional has been extensively recognized as a detrimental force capable of compromising the quality of life and job performance of workers (NIOSH, 1999). The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines job stress as a harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when job demands are not aligned with the worker's capabilities, resources, or needs.

In line with this definition, Ladou and Harrison (2007) argue that stress represents a maladaptive human response to external stimuli, which may originate from organizational structures, limited career development opportunities, excessive workloads, or the pressures of a demanding lifestyle. These factors cumulatively create

a stressful work environment that can manifest in a variety of negative outcomes. However, it is worth noting that moderate levels of stress, if managed effectively, can serve as a motivational force that enhances individual performance and enables employees to meet work related goals. In this regard, a nuanced understanding of stress must differentiate between distress and eustress, with the latter contributing positively to task achievement and personal growth (Quick, Cooper, & Quick, 1987).

Every occupation inherently carries a distinct level of stress exposure, and if not managed appropriately, occupational stress can result in significant health issues. Chronic stress, in particular, has been linked to a multitude of health complications, which can deteriorate employee well-being and productivity over time (Kivimäki et al., 2006). This problem becomes increasingly salient with age, as older workers tend to be more susceptible to the physiological and psychological impacts of persistent stress. Moreover, work-related stress is closely associated with clinical depression, which can profoundly affect job satisfaction, work engagement, and overall quality of work life (Melchior et al., 2007). Stress also correlates with an elevated risk of workplace accidents and injuries, as highly stressed employees often demonstrate reduced concentration, decision-making capacity, and physical coordination.

Aminian (2005) identified driving as a profession that is particularly susceptible to occupational stress. Driving as an occupational task demands a high level of cognitive functioning, technical proficiency, acute attention, sound judgment, and prompt decision-making capabilities. Given these demands, driving instructors whose roles involve guiding and supervising learner drivers are especially vulnerable to stress-induced performance impairments. Stress can compromise their ability to provide accurate instruction, make timely decisions, and maintain situational awareness, all of which are critical to road safety (Aminian, 2005). Increased work-related stress among professional drivers and instructors may result in mental and cognitive fatigue, which not only diminishes their teaching quality but may also jeopardize the safety of learners and the public. The theoretical framework by Simon and Corbett (1996) suggests that stress and anxiety impede a driver's compliance with traffic laws, thus contributing to an increased risk of fatal accidents and significant economic loss. Empirical findings by Vrijkotte, van Doornen, and de Geus (1999) further support this assertion, noting that occupational stress elevates cortisol levels and autonomic arousal, which in turn impairs task performance, vigilance, and risk assessment.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), road traffic accidents constitute the eighth leading cause of death across all age groups globally (WHO, 2018). Among the various contributing factors to road accidents, human error accounts for an estimated 90% of all cases (Lewin, 1982; Treat et al., 1977). Given this significant statistic, the role of professional driving instructors becomes increasingly critical. These instructors are the first point of contact in shaping a learner driver's understanding of proper driving techniques and road safety principles. Their ability to effectively perform this role is influenced by their mental and emotional well-being.

Despite the importance of their contribution to road safety, there remains a paucity of research examining the occupational stressors specific to professional driving instructors. Existing literature tends to focus more broadly on stress in high risk or high demand professions, often overlooking instructional roles within the transportation sector. This gap underscores the necessity for targeted investigations into the stress-related experiences of this professional group. Accordingly, the present study aims to explore the dimensions of occupational stress among professional driving instructors, with particular attention to their background characteristics and workplace stressors. By identifying the factors that contribute to elevated stress levels in this profession, the study seeks to provide a foundation for developing interventions and policies that enhance occupational well-being and promote road safety through improved instructional quality.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are:

RO1: To examine the factors contributing to occupational stress among employees.

RO2: To analyze the most significant factors of occupational stress experienced by employees.

RO3: To identify appropriate strategies for managing occupational stress in the workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress Factor: Age

Age has been identified as a significant demographic variable influencing the level and nature of occupational stress experienced by employees. As individuals age, physiological resilience may decline, and they may face additional stressors such as health complications, caregiving responsibilities, or anxieties related to retirement planning. Older employees may also experience difficulties adapting to technological changes or organizational restructuring, which can intensify perceived stress levels. Conversely, younger employees, particularly those new to the workforce, may encounter stress stemming from job insecurity, lack of experience, or challenges in work-life balance. Thus, age functions as a moderating factor that shapes how employees perceive, react to, and manage stress in the workplace (Kompier, 2005; Beehr & Newman, 1978).

Stress Factor: Workload

Workload has been consistently identified as one of the most prominent contributors to occupational stress across various professions. Excessive job demands, particularly those that exceed an individual's capacity, time, or resources, can lead to psychological strain, physical exhaustion, and diminished job satisfaction (Karasek, 1979). Employees burdened with overwhelming workloads often experience heightened levels of fatigue, reduced cognitive functioning, and increased susceptibility to burnout, which ultimately impair both individual productivity and organizational efficiency (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Furthermore, a persistent imbalance between effort and reward where employees continuously exert high levels of energy without proportional recognition or compensation can aggravate emotional exhaustion and foster negative attitudes toward the workplace (Siegrist, 1996). This is especially prevalent in roles with limited job control or autonomy, where employees may feel powerless in managing their own work pace or prioritization. The perception of workload is also subjective and may vary depending on factors such as role clarity, time pressure, and task complexity. Hence, unmanaged workload pressure not only jeopardizes employee health but also contributes to higher absenteeism, lower morale, and elevated turnover rates (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994).

Stress Factor: Financial

Financial insecurity is a well-documented source of psychological distress that significantly influences occupational stress levels among employees. Economic pressures whether arising from insufficient wages, unstable employment, rising living costs, or personal debt can contribute to persistent anxiety and mental fatigue, which in turn compromise job performance and overall well-being (Peirce et al., 1996). Workers who face financial strain are often preoccupied with concerns about meeting basic needs, repaying obligations, or supporting dependents, which detracts from their cognitive focus and emotional availability at work. Moreover, financial stress is strongly correlated with elevated risks of depression, burnout, and even physical health conditions such as hypertension and cardiovascular disease (Kim & Garman, 2003).

In many cases, low-income employees may also be required to engage in multiple jobs or extended working hours to sustain their livelihoods, further exacerbating work-related fatigue and disrupting work-life balance. According to the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996), when employees perceive a disconnect between the financial rewards they receive and the efforts they invest, it results in emotional dissonance and chronic dissatisfaction. In organizational contexts where financial support systems, wage transparency, or employee assistance programs are limited or absent, the burden of financial stress can be particularly pronounced. Thus, financial well-being is a critical, yet often overlooked, component of occupational health strategies aimed at reducing workplace stress and improving employee resilience.

Stress Factor: Family

Family-related responsibilities have increasingly been acknowledged as a critical source of occupational stress, particularly in the context of modern dual-income households and the growing prevalence of informal caregiving

roles. One of the most prominent stressors in this domain is work–family conflict (WFC), a form of inter-role conflict where the demands of work and family are mutually incompatible. Empirical evidence demonstrates that WFC significantly correlates with elevated levels of anxiety and emotional exhaustion among working individuals, (Su, 2025). Employees juggling family obligations such as childcare, eldercare, and domestic responsibilities often report reduced psychological availability at work, which undermines focus, performance, and interpersonal functioning, (Han, 2023). This is especially relevant in high-demand professions like academia. A recent study by Kim, Maijan, and Yeo (2025) on university lecturers found that WFC contributes to increased stress and burnout, with occupational tenure acting as a moderating factor that influences the degree of job satisfaction loss. Similarly, Tavassoli (2025) established that both work to family and family to work conflicts are predictors of job dissatisfaction, reduced life satisfaction, and increased turnover intention, with burnout mediating these relationships. The mental and physical toll of family-related stress is also well-documented among informal caregivers, especially those delivering high-intensity care to elderly or chronically ill family members. According to the Censers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2024), the prevalence of frequent mental distress and clinical depression among caregivers has significantly increased between 2015 and 2022. This aligns with findings by Xue et al. (2025), who highlighted that "sandwich carers" individuals simultaneously caring for both children and aging parents face heightened risks of anxiety, depression, and deteriorating physical health, particularly when caregiving responsibilities exceed 20 hours per week. In sum, family-related stress functions as a significant psychosocial hazard that not only affects employee well-being but also impairs workplace productivity.

Stress Factor: Work Environment

The work environment plays a pivotal role in shaping the psychological well-being of employees, particularly in high-demand professions such as driving and driver instruction. For professional drivers and driving instructors, work-related stressors are often embedded in the very structure of their daily tasks and physical setting. Prolonged sedentary hours, exposure to traffic congestion, inconsistent scheduling, and high cognitive demands have been consistently linked to elevated levels of occupational stress (Useche et al., 2021). Driving instructors, for instance, must maintain constant vigilance, emotional regulation, and multitasking in unpredictable traffic conditions while also managing the anxiety of novice drivers this combination intensifies the mental and emotional load (Amoadu, 2024). The physical work environment also contributes significantly to stress. Inadequate rest facilities, poor cabin ergonomics, and exposure to noise or environmental hazards increase physical discomfort, which may further exacerbate psychological strain (Montoro et al., 2018). Moreover, a lack of organizational support, minimal autonomy, and precarious employment conditions such as contract-based work with little job security can reduce motivation and lead to emotional exhaustion (Benevene et al., 2020). These factors align with the Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) model, where the lack of reward (in terms of pay, recognition, or stability) relative to the effort invested amplifies the risk of burnout and mental health decline (Siegrist & Li, 2021). A cross-sectional study among public transport drivers demonstrated that poor work environments were significantly associated with increased incidents of risky driving behaviour, such as speeding and violation of traffic rules mediated by stress-related variables like fatigue, irritability, and low attentiveness (Useche et al., 2021). Instructors are also not immune; the combination of high responsibility, performance pressure, and rigid lesson schedules creates a high-strain environment, particularly in urban settings with high traffic density and strict regulatory requirements (Amoadu, 2024). Collectively, these findings emphasize the urgent need to redesign the work environment of driving-related occupations by introducing structured breaks, ergonomic interventions, mental health support systems, and organizational policies that improve autonomy and reward fairness. Doing so would not only enhance worker well-being but also improve road safety outcomes.

Stress Factor: Management

Management practices and leadership style have a profound impact on employee stress levels, particularly in high-risk, routine intensive occupations such as driving and driver instruction. Poor managerial support, inconsistent communication, micromanagement, and lack of recognition are consistently linked with increased occupational stress and emotional exhaustion (Benevene et al., 2020). Employees who perceive their supervisors as unsupportive or unfairly critical are more likely to experience decreased job satisfaction, reduced motivation,

and higher levels of psychological strain. In driver-related professions, stress related to management can arise from unrealistic performance expectations, punitive feedback systems, rigid scheduling, and lack of involvement in decision-making. A recent study by Lecca et al. (2020) highlighted that professional drivers who experienced low levels of managerial fairness and inadequate communication reported significantly higher stress levels and lower overall well-being. The perceived quality of supervisor–employee relationships, often conceptualized as Leader–Member Exchange (LMX**)**, plays a buffering role in how stress is internalized. High-quality LMX is associated with better emotional regulation and resilience, whereas low LMX exacerbates the effects of job demands (Liao et al., 2022). Moreover, in organizations with authoritarian or transactional leadership styles, the psychological safety of employees tends to be compromised, limiting their ability to express concerns, suggest improvements, or request support (Zhang & Yang, 2022). This environment can lead to chronic role ambiguity and reduced job control two well-documented predictors of workplace stress. Conversely, transformational and inclusive management approaches have been shown to foster a sense of belonging, increase perceived organizational support, and reduce emotional burnout (Kowalczuk et al., 2020).

In the case of driving instructors, who often operate in semi-autonomous roles under the governance of training centers or state authorities, stress is further intensified when administrative processes are inefficient, targets are unclear, or constructive feedback is absent. Management systems that prioritize compliance over development tend to create an atmosphere of fear and disempowerment rather than growth and mastery (Liu et al., 2023). These findings underscore the need for a paradigm shift toward people-centered leadership in high-pressure work environments. Effective stress-reduction strategies should therefore include transparent communication, participative decision-making, ongoing performance dialogue, and mental health literacy among managers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research design, utilizing a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool to measure the level of occupational stress, identify its key sources, and examine demographic and contextual factors associated with stress among respondents. The quantitative approach was selected for its capacity to generate measurable data, facilitate statistical analysis, and support the generalization of findings to the broader target population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The questionnaire was developed in the form of an online survey using Google Forms, with items adapted from the Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI) developed by Cooper et al. Associates (1988), a widely recognized and validated instrument for assessing workplace stress dimensions. The OSI framework provided the theoretical foundation for item selection and ensured alignment with the research objectives.

The study employed a convenience sampling method, selecting participants from among the staff of a driving academy located in Selangor. The target population consisted of employees directly involved in instructional, administrative, and operational roles within the driving academy, as these individuals were considered to have direct exposure to occupational stressors relevant to the study. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections. Section A captured demographic information, including age, gender, education level, job position, and work experience. Section B measured the overall level of occupational stress, while Section C identified the specific factors contributing to occupational stress. Section C consisted of six sub-dimensions: age, workload, financial factors, family-related factors, management role, and work environment. Responses to all items were recorded using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree, enabling ordinal level measurement of agreement intensity for statistical analysis. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to the respondents via a secure Google Form link, and they were given a two-week period to complete it. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained digitally before the respondents could access the questionnaire. The use of a Likert scale facilitated the application of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including the computation of frequency distributions, correlations, and comparisons between demographic groups.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study were analyzed based on gender, age, marital

status, length of service, and commuting distance to the workplace. The results revealed that a majority of respondents were male, comprising 15 individuals (60%), while the remaining 10 respondents (40%) were female. In terms of age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents fell within the 26–35 years category, accounting for 11 individuals (44%). This was followed closely by those aged 36–45 years, comprising 10 respondents (40%). Respondents aged 18–25 years and those aged 46 years and above each constituted 8% of the sample, with two individuals in each category.

Regarding marital status, 16 respondents (64%) were married, while nine respondents (36%) were single. Analysis of length of service indicated that the majority had been employed between one and three years (40%), followed by those with more than 10 years of service (36%). Respondents who had served less than one year and those with between seven and ten years of service each represented 12% of the sample, while no respondents reported between four and six years of service.

The commuting distance from home to the workplace varied among respondents. The largest group reported living 11–15 km away (36%), followed by those residing 16–20 km away (28%). A smaller proportion lived less than 5 km from the workplace (16%), while 20% of respondents reported commuting more than 20 km. Table 1 below shows the summary of respondents' demographic profile.

Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Demographic Profile

Variable	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender	Male	15	60.0
	Female	10	40.0
Age	18-25 years	2	8.0
	26–35 years	11	44.0
	36–45 years	10	40.0
	46 years and above	2	8.0
Marital Status	Single	9	36.0
	Married	16	64.0
Length of Service	Less than 1 year	3	12.0
	1–3 years	10	40.0
	4–6 years	0	0.0
	7–10 years	3	12.0
	More than 10 years	9	36.0
Commuting Distance	Less than 5 km	4	16.0
	11–15 km	9	36.0
	16–20 km	7	28.0
	More than 20 km	5	20.0

Stress Factor: Age

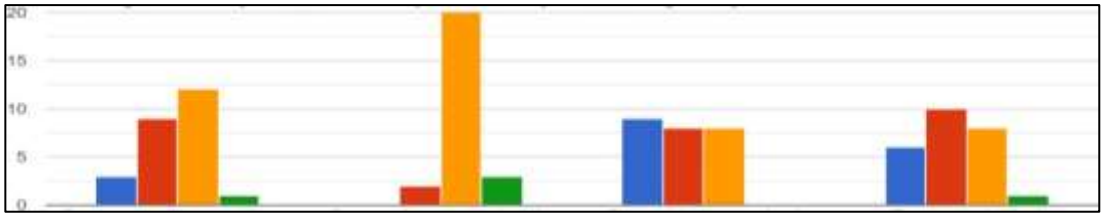

Figure 1. Responses for Stress Factor Age

Figure 1 above illustrated the occupational stress scores related to the age factor. The overall mean score for this category was 2.65, indicating that the perceived influence of age on occupational stress among respondents fell within the moderate-to-low range. While age was not identified as the most dominant contributor to workplace stress, certain age-related elements showed notable impact.

The item *"I often feel too tired after a full day's work"* received the highest mean score of 3.04, classified as a high level of stress. This suggests that physical fatigue is a prevalent issue, affecting 80% of respondents. Importantly, this outcome points towards the physiological implications of sustained work rather than chronological age per se. Fatigue is recognised in occupational health literature as a multidimensional construct influenced by work intensity, shift patterns, ergonomic conditions, and recovery opportunities (Boksem & Tops, 2008; Goel et al., 2013). Thus, although the statement was measured under the "age" factor, the root cause of fatigue could be attributed to workload or work environment conditions that disproportionately affect employees at certain life stages. The statement *"I often experience viral infections and colds while working"* recorded a mean score of 2.96, still within the moderate-to-low range but close to the threshold of a high category. This may indicate that immune function, potentially affected by age-related physiological changes or prolonged exposure to workplace stress, could be a contributory factor. Previous studies have shown that chronic occupational stress can impair immune response, making employees more susceptible to illness regardless of age (Segerstrom & Miller, 2004).

Interestingly, the item *"I face discrimination because of lack of experience"* had the lowest mean score of 2.16, suggesting that perceived age-related discrimination is not a prominent concern among respondents. This finding contrasts with certain organisational behaviour studies that highlight ageism and experience-based bias as significant workplace stressors, particularly for younger employees (Ng & Feldman, 2012). In the context of the driving academy, the relatively low discrimination score may be explained by the skill-based nature of the profession, where performance outcomes and technical competence often outweigh chronological age in determining credibility.

Overall, the data indicate that while specific physiological and health-related issues such as fatigue and susceptibility to illness are reported more frequently, age in isolation is not perceived as a direct and significant stressor. Instead, these findings suggest that age interacts with other factors such as workload, working hours, and physical job demands, aligning with the transactional model of stress, which posits that stress emerges from the interaction between personal characteristics and environmental demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Future interventions should therefore focus not solely on age-based support but also on workplace modifications, health promotion initiatives, and fatigue management strategies that benefit employees across all age groups.

Stress Factor: Workload

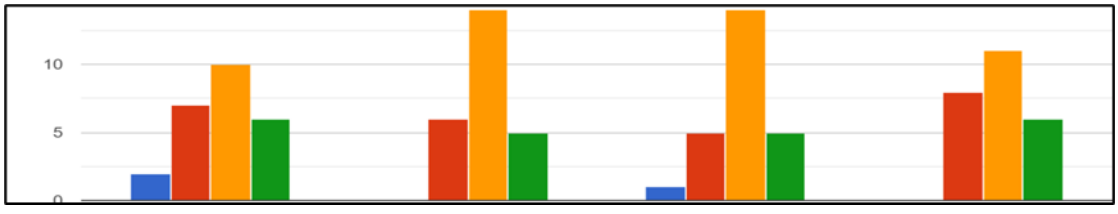

Figure 2. Responses for Stress Factor Workload

Figure 2 above illustrated the occupational stress scores related to the workload factor. The overall mean score for this factor was 2.84, indicating that the perceived impact of workload on occupational stress among respondents fell within the moderate-to-low range. Although this category does not reach a high stress classification, the findings suggest that workload remains a relevant source of pressure in the workplace. The items *"I feel burdened with the number of tasks assigned to me"* and *"I often have to work overtime to complete tasks"* recorded the highest mean scores of 2.92, both categorised as moderate-to-low stress but approaching the high threshold. These results imply that while the absolute stress level reported is not extreme, the frequency of extended working hours and the perceived excess in task volume are significant concerns. Previous studies have linked prolonged overtime work to physical fatigue, reduced work–life balance, and long-term burnout risk, particularly in occupations requiring high vigilance and sustained concentration, such as driver instruction (Van der Hulst & Geurts, 2001). The statement *"I am assigned work that is not suitable to my qualifications and position"* received a mean score of 2.80, suggesting that role–task mismatch contributes moderately to stress levels. Mismatches between employees' qualifications and assigned tasks may reduce perceived job competence and satisfaction, which in turn can diminish motivation and increase role-related tension (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991). Similarly, the item *"I am required to complete additional work"* yielded a mean score of 2.72, reflecting the additional strain that unplanned or supplementary tasks can create, particularly when such assignments occur without adequate planning or resource allocation.

Notably, 76% of respondents reported that heavy workload was a major contributor to their occupational stress. This is consistent with findings in the occupational health literature, where high job demands and limited resources are recognised as primary antecedents of job strain under the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In the context of a driving academy, workload pressures may stem from a combination of operational demands, administrative responsibilities, and instructional duties often compounded by unpredictable scheduling, student performance variability, and safety requirements.

Although the mean scores indicate only a moderate to low level of workload-related stress overall, the qualitative implication is that such stressors, if left unaddressed, have the potential to escalate into chronic strain, particularly when combined with other factors such as management practices or work environment conditions. These findings suggest that workload management interventions such as balanced task allocation, scheduling flexibility, and realistic performance targets may help mitigate potential long-term stress and enhance employee well-being.

Stress Factor: Financial

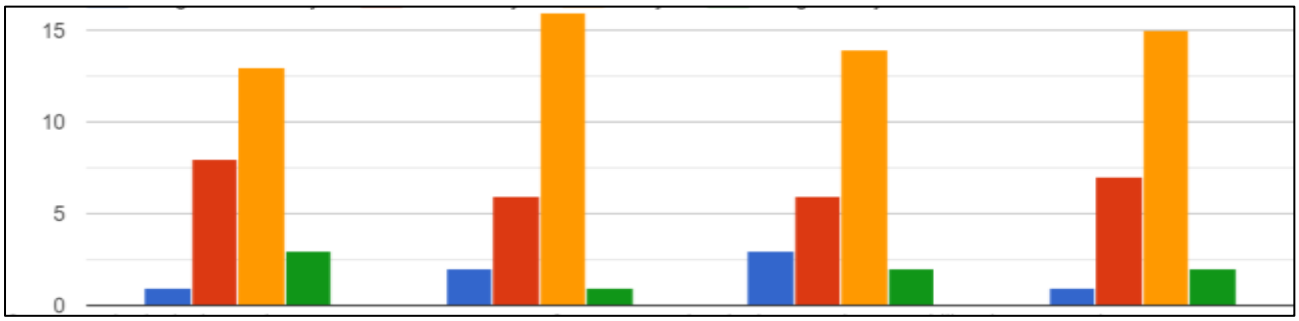

Figure 3. Responses for Stress Factor Financial

Figure 3 above illustrated the occupational stress scores related to the financial factor. The overall mean score for this factor was 2.67, indicating a moderate-to-low level of stress. While this category does not register as high stress in absolute terms, the qualitative feedback and frequency of endorsement suggest that financial strain remains a significant underlying stressor for many respondents. The items *"I face financial pressure that affects my work performance"* and *"I engage in additional employment to supplement my income"* both recorded a mean score of 2.72, reflecting that financial stress can manifest in both the psychological burden of economic insecurity and the practical necessity of seeking secondary income sources. In many cases, taking on additional work increases fatigue and reduces recovery time, potentially exacerbating other stress factors such as workload and work–life imbalance (Kim & Garman, 2003).

The statement "My salary is sufficient to meet my living needs" had a mean score of 2.64, indicating that a considerable proportion of respondents perceive their earnings as inadequate relative to their cost of living. Similarly, the item *"I continue in my career to stabilise my finances rather than out of genuine interest or commitment to my work"* yielded a mean score of 2.60, suggesting that financial necessity, rather than vocational satisfaction, is a key driver of continued employment for some participants. This aligns with existing research showing that financial strain is associated with lower intrinsic motivation, reduced job satisfaction, and higher turnover intention (Sinclair & Cheung, 2016). Overall, 80% of respondents reported concerns about financial stability, with uncertainty regarding salary increments and bonuses being cited as primary contributors to stress. These findings are consistent with the Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) model (Siegrist & Li, 2021), which posits that stress arises when high effort is not matched by adequate rewards whether financial, social, or career related. In the context of this study, financial instability emerges as both a direct stressor and a compounding factor that interacts with other dimensions such as workload, job control, and personal well-being. Addressing such stressors may require organisational interventions including transparent remuneration policies, fair reward systems, and access to financial planning resources.

Stress Factor: Family

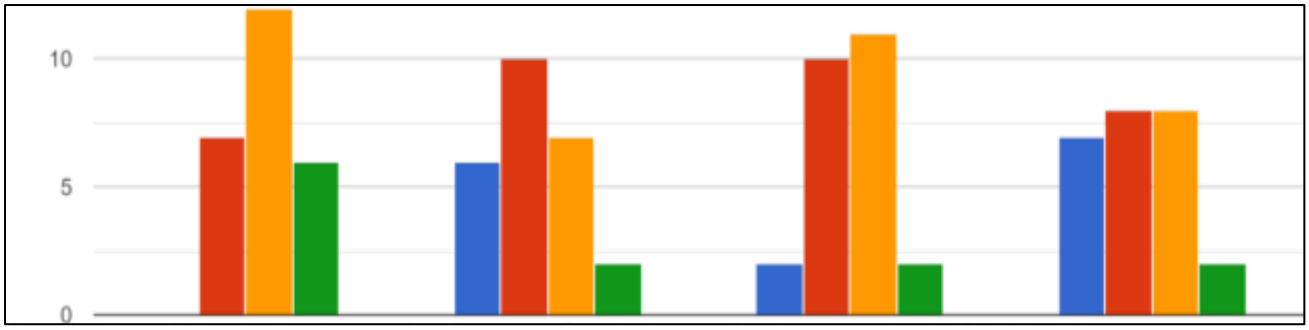

Figure 4. Responses for Stress Factor Family

Figure 4 above illustrated the occupational stress scores related to the family factor. The overall mean score for this factor was 2.47, which falls within the moderate-to-low range. Despite this, qualitative observations indicate that family obligations and work–life balance issues represent an important stressor for employees. In fact, 85% of respondents reported experiencing difficulties in achieving balance between work and personal life, which they identified as a source of considerable strain.

The item *"I can balance my family and work responsibilities well"* recorded the highest mean score of 2.96, suggesting that although many employees perceive themselves as somewhat capable of balancing the two domains, this equilibrium often comes with stress. Conversely, the items *"My family responsibilities cause stress at work"* and *"The distance between my home and workplace is relatively far"* each yielded a mean score of 2.20, reflecting that, while less dominant, family obligations and commuting distance still play a role in shaping stress levels. The statement *"I am responsible for managing family matters, including emergencies and illnesses, which may affect my ability to attend work"* produced a mean score of 2.52, highlighting that caregiving responsibilities continue to impose an additional burden for some respondents.

These findings resonate with existing literature on work family conflict (WFC), which emphasises that the inability to manage the competing demands of professional and domestic life significantly contributes to employee stress and burnout (Allen et al., 2020). Long working hours and inflexible schedules were identified as key issues by respondents, echoing broader research showing that job demands frequently interfere with family roles, leading to heightened emotional exhaustion (Mauno, Minkkinen, & Feldt, 2021). Moreover, family caregiving responsibilities, particularly when related to emergencies and illness, align with studies indicating that such unexpected demands often increase absenteeism and reduce work engagement (Tavassoli, 2025).

In addition, the commuting factor though scoring lower than other items remains relevant. Long commuting distances have been consistently linked with reduced job satisfaction, increased fatigue, and spillover stress effects on family life (Zhang & Zhao, 2021). This suggests that structural factors, such as geographical distance

and transportation access, may indirectly exacerbate work–family conflict in certain contexts, such as driving academies with fixed locations.

Overall, while family-related stressors were not the highest-ranking contributors to occupational stress, the data underline the importance of work life balance initiatives and family supportive organisational practices. Interventions such as flexible scheduling, family emergency leave, and proximity-based work arrangements could help reduce the tension between professional and domestic roles, thereby improving employee well-being and job performance.

Stress Factor: Work Environment

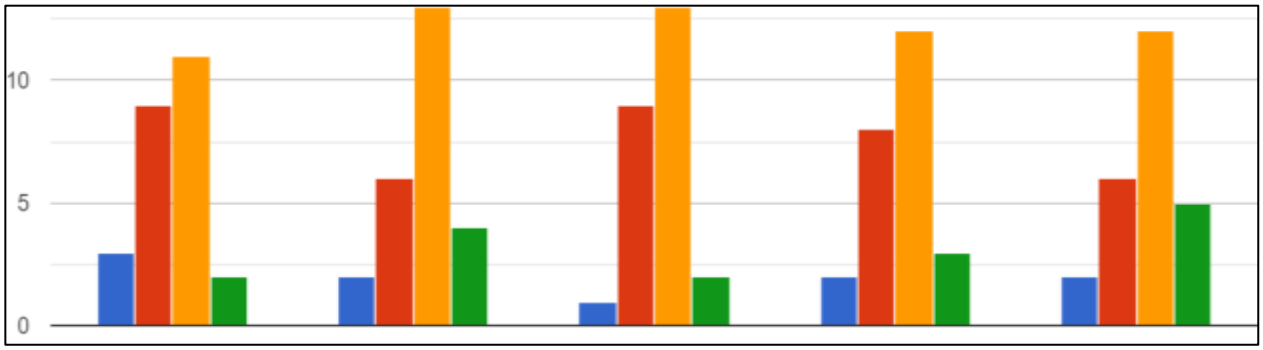

Figure 5. Responses for Stress Factor Work Environment

Figure 5 above illustrated the occupational stress scores related to the work environment factor. The overall mean score for this factor was 2.68, indicating that the work environment was perceived to contribute a moderate to low level of stress among respondents. Nevertheless, several specific environmental aspects were highlighted as meaningful contributors to workplace strain.

The highest mean score was observed for the item *"I experience stress because of unclear communication at the workplace"* (M = 2.80). This finding suggests that ineffective or ambiguous communication channels within the organisation are perceived as a notable source of stress. Clear and consistent communication has been identified in prior studies as a critical determinant of job satisfaction and employee well-being, while communication breakdowns often lead to frustration, role ambiguity, and diminished organisational trust (Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020).

Other stress inducing elements included *traffic congestion during daily commuting* (M = 2.76), *noise and unpredictable weather conditions* (M = 2.72), and *exposure to polluted air* (M = 2.64). These factors reflect the external, environmental stressors that employees in urban and semi-urban contexts frequently face. Long commutes and traffic congestion have consistently been linked to increased fatigue, reduced work–life balance, and elevated psychological strain (Zhang & Zhao, 2021). Similarly, persistent noise exposure and poor air quality are associated with negative health outcomes and reduced cognitive functioning, thereby exacerbating work-related stress (Basner et al., 2014).

The lowest mean score was recorded for the item *"My work environment is uncomfortable and causes stress"* (M = 2.48), which nonetheless suggests that over half of respondents (52%) felt their work environment was not fully conducive to productivity. This aligns with broader occupational health literature that stresses the importance of ergonomics, ambient conditions, and psychological safety in shaping employee well-being (MacDonald, 2018).

Taken together, the results underscore that while respondents did not perceive the work environment as the single most dominant stress factor, its cumulative influence through physical discomfort, commuting challenges, exposure to environmental hazards, and communication barriers plays an important role in shaping overall stress experiences. These findings indicate the necessity for organisational strategies such as improved communication protocols, flexible commuting arrangements, and investment in healthier, more comfortable workspaces to mitigate environment-related stress.

Stress Factor: Management

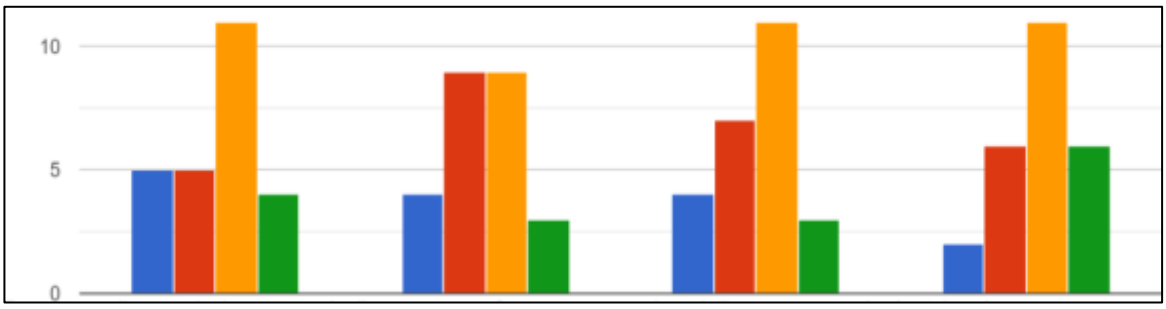

FIGURE 6. Responses for Stress Factor Work Environment

Figure 5 above illustrated the occupational stress scores related to the work environment factor. The overall mean score for this factor was 2.59, indicating a moderate-to-low level of stress. Nonetheless, the responses highlight that managerial support, recognition, and career development opportunities are important contributors to employees perceived stress.

The highest mean score was recorded for the item *"I feel stressed because of limited opportunities for career advancement"* (M = 2.84). This finding indicates that lack of professional growth and progression pathways is one of the most pressing management-related issues affecting respondents. Prior studies have shown that limited career opportunities reduce employee motivation, increase turnover intentions, and contribute to long-term occupational stress (Mao et al., 2020).

Other items such as *"Management at my workplace provides sufficient support"* (M = 2.56), *"Management often recognises my hard work"* (M = 2.44), and *"I feel I receive adequate training to perform my tasks effectively"* (M = 2.52) all scored within the moderate-to-low range. These findings suggest that although respondents did not report extremely high levels of stress, perceived deficiencies in recognition, support, and training are nonetheless viewed as sources of pressure. Consistent with existing literature, lack of managerial support and recognition has been linked to lower employee engagement, reduced job satisfaction, and increased burnout (Kowalczuk et al., 2020).

Overall, 65% of respondents reported that ineffective management practices particularly inadequate appreciation, limited guidance, and lack of developmental opportunities contributed to workplace stress. These findings align with the Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory, which emphasises that high-quality relationships between managers and employees reduce stress and enhance job performance, while low-quality exchanges can amplify role stressors (Liao et al., 2022). In the context of a driving academy, where staff often juggle multiple roles under strict regulatory frameworks, the absence of clear managerial support and recognition may intensify feelings of undervaluation and role strain.

Taken together, the results suggest that management-related stress, while not the most severe compared to other factors, plays an important role in shaping overall employee well-being. Enhancing transparent communication, providing structured training programs, and recognising employee contributions could mitigate management-related stress and foster a more supportive organisational climate.

The findings of this study revealed that the six dimensions of occupational stress age, workload, financial concerns, family responsibilities, work environment, and management practices varied in their relative impact on employees at the driving academy. Overall, the mean scores across all factors ranged between 2.47 and 2.84, indicating that most stressors were perceived at a moderate-to-low level. While no factor was rated as extremely high, the analysis demonstrates that each dimension contributes uniquely to employees' overall stress experience. Age was not identified as a dominant contributor to workplace stress, with an overall mean of 2.65. Although respondents did not strongly attribute their stress to age, many reported high levels of fatigue after a full day's work, suggesting that physical tiredness, rather than chronological age alone, was the more immediate stressor. Age-related discrimination was rated lowest, indicating that skill-based performance may outweigh age as a determinant of credibility in this occupational setting. Workload emerged as one of the more significant

stressors, with an average mean score of 2.84. Respondents frequently highlighted excessive tasks, overtime work, and additional responsibilities without sufficient resources as contributors to stress. This aligns with existing evidence that high job demands, and insufficient recovery opportunities amplify occupational strain. Although the level remained in the moderate-to-low range, the frequency of endorsement suggests workload is an issue requiring attention.

Financial factors produced an overall mean of 2.67. A majority of respondents expressed concerns about financial stability, with 80% reporting that insufficient salaries, uncertainty about bonuses, and the necessity to engage in secondary employment were key stressors. These results suggest that financial insecurity not only undermines job satisfaction but also forces employees to prioritise economic stability over intrinsic motivation for their work. In addition, family-related factors recorded the lowest overall mean at 2.47, but qualitative insights reveal that they are nonetheless important. While some respondents managed to balance family and work responsibilities, 85% acknowledged difficulties in maintaining work–life equilibrium. Long working hours, lack of scheduling flexibility, and unexpected family emergencies were highlighted as stressors that interfered with workplace performance. Additionally, commuting distance added to the sense of imbalance for certain respondents. Work environment stressors had an average mean score of 2.68. Respondents identified issues such as daily traffic congestion, exposure to pollution, noise, and unclear workplace communication as sources of strain. Although the stress level was not particularly high, over half of respondents reported that a non-conducive working environment negatively affected their productivity. This underscores the combined effect of external environmental conditions and internal organisational communication on occupational stress.

Finally, management-related stress was reported with an overall mean of 2.59. Respondents expressed concerns about insufficient support, lack of recognition, limited training opportunities, and inadequate career advancement prospects. Approximately 65% indicated that ineffective management practices contributed to their stress, particularly the absence of clear appreciation and developmental pathways. While not as pronounced as workload or financial stress, managerial practices were seen as a critical contextual factor shaping overall employee well-being. Taken together, the results demonstrate that although each stress factor was rated within a moderate-to-low range, workload, financial instability, and managerial practices emerged as the most salient stressors. Conversely, age and family responsibilities appeared to exert less direct influence but interacted with other variables such as fatigue, commuting, and work–life balance to create additional strain. These findings highlight the multidimensional nature of occupational stress, where both organisational and personal domains intersect to influence employees' experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated occupational stress among employees of a Malaysian driving academy, focusing on six major domains: age, workload, financial factors, family responsibilities, work environment, and management practices. Using a structured questionnaire adapted from the Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI), responses from 25 employees were analyzed to determine the relative impact of each factor on workplace stress. The overall findings indicate that while stress levels across all domains fell within the moderate-to-low range (mean scores between 2.47 and 2.84), important variations emerged across the six dimensions. Workload emerged as the most significant stressor, with a mean score of 2.84. Employees frequently reported pressure from excessive tasks, overtime, and responsibilities that exceeded their resources or role expectations. These results echo existing literature that identifies workload as one of the most consistent antecedents of occupational stress across professions (Karasek, 1979; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Although stress scores were not classified as high, the frequency with which workload was cited underscores its practical salience. Financial concerns (M = 2.67) represented another substantial contributor. Many respondents highlighted insufficient salaries, uncertainty regarding bonuses, and the need for supplementary employment as factors exacerbating stress. This indicates that economic insecurity not only affects employees' financial stability but also diminishes intrinsic motivation for their work, aligning with the Effort–Reward Imbalance framework (Siegrist, 1996). Work environment stress (M = 2.68) also played a notable role, with respondents citing traffic congestion, exposure to pollution, noise, and unclear workplace communication as sources of strain. Although these factors might appear external or situational, they nonetheless shaped daily experiences of stress and impacted productivity. Similarly, management-related stress (M = 2.59) reflected concerns about limited career development, lack of recognition,

and inadequate managerial support. Approximately two-thirds of respondents identified these issues as significant, suggesting that leadership practices profoundly shape stress perceptions even in a relatively small organization. In contrast, family-related stress (M = 2.47) and age-related stress (M = 2.65) were rated lower overall, though both domains remain important in understanding the broader stress ecology. Respondents acknowledged difficulties balancing work and family obligations, with long hours and inflexible schedules cited as barriers to work–life balance. While age itself was not perceived as a dominant stressor, physical fatigue and susceptibility to illness both potentially correlated with age were reported as concerns. Collectively, these findings illustrate the multidimensional nature of occupational stress in the context of a driving academy. Stress does not arise from a single dominant source but from the interplay between organizational structures, environmental conditions, and personal circumstances. Although stress levels were moderate, the cumulative effect of workload, financial strain, environmental discomfort, and limited managerial support has the potential to erode employee well-being and organizational effectiveness over time.

The results of this study support several established theoretical frameworks of occupational stress. The prominence of workload-related stress is consistent with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which emphasizes that high job demands, when unaccompanied by sufficient resources, lead to strain. Similarly, the findings on financial stress resonate with Siegrist's (1996) Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) model, where inadequate compensation for effort results in chronic dissatisfaction and stress. Management-related stress aligns with Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory, which highlights the role of supervisory relationships in shaping employee well-being (Liao et al., 2022). The results also extend the transactional model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which posits that stress arises from the dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and environmental demands. In this case, employees did not perceive age per se as a stressor, but the interaction of age with fatigue, workload, and health concerns produced notable stress experiences. Similarly, family stressors were not universally high, but commuting distance, emergency responsibilities, and long working hours interacted with personal circumstances to create stress. By integrating these frameworks, the study underscores the importance of viewing occupational stress as a systemic phenomenon rather than an isolated issue. Stress management interventions must therefore be multi-pronged, addressing both structural and individual determinants. The findings highlight several practical strategies that can be implemented by driving academies and similar organizations to mitigate occupational stress. First, workload redistribution and task alignment should be prioritized, with managers ensuring that responsibilities are allocated fairly and in accordance with employees' qualifications and capacities. Rotational scheduling, realistic performance targets, and adequate recovery periods could help reduce fatigue and prevent burnout. Addressing financial insecurity is equally important, where transparent salary structures, regular performance-based increments, and access to financial planning resources may reduce reliance on secondary employment and allow employees to focus more fully on their primary roles. Improvements to the work environment, such as offering commuting flexibility through staggered start times, investing in ergonomic workspaces, and minimizing noise or environmental discomfort, could enhance daily working conditions, while the establishment of clear communication protocols would reduce ambiguity and confusion. Supportive management practices also play a critical role; leadership training that emphasizes recognition, constructive feedback, and career development, combined with mentoring initiatives and participative decision-making, can strengthen relationships between supervisors and staff and reduce managerial stressors. In addition, work–life balance policies, such as flexible scheduling, family emergency leave, and targeted support for employees with caregiving responsibilities, would help alleviate stress arising from family commitments, particularly for those facing long commuting distances or rigid work schedules. Finally, health promotion and fatigue management initiatives—ranging from wellness programs, health screenings, and stress-reduction workshops to education on sleep hygiene, physical activity, and recovery practices—could empower employees to manage fatigue and illness more effectively, thereby mitigating the physiological impacts of sustained work demands.

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