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An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Mental Health Strategies on the Performance of Selected Road Freight Drivers in Harare Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of the study was to assess the effectiveness of mental health strategies on the performance of drivers in the road freight transport sector in Zimbabwe. This qualitative study guided by the Interpretivist research philosophy purposively selected 20 participants in the freight transport sector as a sample size. A structured interview guide was then used to solicit data which were analysed using thematic analysis and the data were also presented in themes. Ethical issues were considered before data were collected from research participants. Major findings of the study showed that long distance freight drivers have a great risk of stress-related mental disorders which, in turn, are associated with absenteeism, sick leave, and negative safety outcomes. The study also found that the exposure to traumatic events in long distance freight transportation, such as suicide and violence, increases the risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. The research findings further showed that mental disorders represent high economic and health burdens for the long distance freight transportation drivers in the Zimbabwean transport sector. Based on the research findings, the study concluded that long and irregular hours, delivery schedules, limited access to facilities, isolation, being away from home and family, amongst other factors, can all contribute to stress, and can affect concentration and, therefore, performance and safety. The research, therefore, recommended that for many organisations, support to create positive mental health in and through work, is needed to harness operational performance in the discharge and conduct of duties. Also, development of a mental health model in this sector is needed to enhance performance in the freight transport sector in Zimbabwe.

Kay Words: **Mental Health, Strategies, Effect, Freight, Drivers, Performance.**

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INTRODUCTION

While mental health has gained global policy attention, its impact on daily occupational functioning, particularly in high-demand sectors like freight road transport, remains insufficiently explored. Professional truck drivers face chronic stressors, including long hours, isolation, disrupted sleep, and regulatory pressures, all of which increase the risk of mental health issues such as anxiety, burnout, and sleep disorders (WHO, 2024; Goodhall, 2023; Adeniran, 2023). Yet, the industry mostly prioritises physical safety and logistics over psychosocial well-being. This study identifies a critical research gap: the lack of integrated, theory-driven analyses on how mental health challenges affect truck drivers' operational performance and quality of life. To address this, the research is grounded in the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, which collectively explain how high job demands and low recovery resources lead to psychological strain and reduced resilience. By applying these frameworks, the study aims to uncover systemic, organisational, and individual-level factors contributing to mental health decline in the freight sector, with the goal of informing more holistic interventions and policy reforms.

To date, research about the direct and indirect links between transport, health and wellbeing has been relatively scarce and has not been synthesised to create a comprehensive evidence base (Goodhall, 2023; Adeniran, 2023; Bianchi, 2023, Adendorf, 2023). Since the priority of the Department for Transport is to place users at the heart of the transport system, it is essential to develop a solid understanding of the impact that transport has on the mental and physical health of individuals (Ferris, 2020; Vendeschurren, 2020; Nelson & Murray, 2020; Barole, Rout, Goel, Vadagiri & Mathew, 2022). Research suggests that drivers are at increased risk of several occupational health induced conditions (Gitahi & Ogollah, 2021; Pedraza-Martinez & Van Wassenhove, 2021; Barone & Decarlo, 2023; Johnson & Scholes, 2023). The incidence of mental illness treatment among freight drivers in the transport sector is increasing globally (Ferris, 2020; Vendeschurren, 2020; Nelson & Murray, 2020; Barole, Rout, Goel, Vadagiri &

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Mathew, 2022). Mental health problems can vary significantly from short-term, minor impacts on one particular aspect of living, to long-term, major adverse impacts that pervade many aspects of living. Many people will be subject to poor mental health at some point in their lives. Mental health difficulties can affect people's ability to form and maintain relationships, decision making, concentration, productivity, sleep patterns, self-confidence leading to substantial disruptions to their way of life (Gitahi & Ogollah, 2021; Pedraza-Martinez & Van Wassenhove, 2021; Barone & Decarlo, 2023; Johnson & Scholes, 2023). This has not spared freight drivers in the transport sector.

Mental illness refers to a range of chronic, subjectively unpleasant psychological conditions that range from mild symptoms to severe outcomes (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2024). Currently, depression among freight drivers accounts for 4.3% of the global burden of disease and one of the leading causes of disability worldwide (World Health Organisation, 2024), while in New Zealand, depression is the third leading cause of health loss (Ministry of Health, 2023). 16.3% of the population has been diagnosed with common mental disorders such as depression, bipolar or anxiety disorders, and a further 6.1% are psychologically distressed (Ministry of Health, 2023). Given that the most recent report from the Health and Safety Executive stated that in 2022/23 stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 49% of all work-related ill health cases and 54% of all working days lost due to ill health, this serves as further evidence that the cost of poor mental health to United Kingdom businesses is hugely significant (Gitahi & Ogollah, 2021). However, researchers have pointed out that mental health disorders are more prevalent in the trucking industry than in the general public (Stefanescu, Mocan, Neculai, 2022; Vendeschurren, 2020; Nelson & Murray, 2020; Barole, Rout, Goel, Vadagiri & Mathew, 2022). The very nature of the driving profession, for example, working alone for long periods of time away from family and friends, the pressures of "just-in-time" deliveries, traffic and weather conditions, disrupted sleep patterns, and lack of exercise, can create increased feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression (Stefanescu, Mocan, Neculai, 2022; Vendeschurren, 2020; Nelson & Murray, 2020; Barole, Rout, Goel, Vadagiri & Mathew, 2022). In turn, mental health distress can lead to further fatigue, anger, trouble with focusing, and increased risky behaviours such as alcohol or drug use. These

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factors increase a driver's probability of being involved in a preventable accident (Nirinarisoa & Razananampa, 2024; Nauki, 2024). The need for industry leaders to take direct action on the mental health of drivers within the transport and logistics sector is becoming increasingly obvious.

There has been increasing recognition of the effect that the social and built environment of freight professional drivers has impacted on stress-related health and wellbeing incident (Nirinarisoa & Razananampa, 2024; Nauki, 2024). The key pathways in which mental health is affected in this domain by the environment is through stress, feelings of control and the influence that it has on drivers' social networks and support, each of which may be a result of direct or indirect characteristics of the environment (Halpern, 2022). Accordingly, Health and Well-being in the Workplace' Report (2023) found that 27% of transport and logistics workers surveyed in Canada and the United States of America had taken time off work due to unmanageable stress or mental health conditions in the previous 12 months, and 19% of respondents were planning to leave the profession in the next 12 months because of the conditions. In addition, according to a report published by Deloitte in 2017, the transport and logistics sector had the highest level of absenteeism within the private sector industries surveyed in Europe and Asia, whereas transport and communications experienced the second greatest level of workplace stress. The impact of stress, depression and anxiety within the transport and logistics sector had also witnessed a plummeted percentage in the Middle East where it recorded a sickness absence rate of 25% of freight drivers in Oman and 26% overall in Iran, Saudi Arabia , Lebanon and Israel (Office of National Statistics, 2023). A similar trend has impacted in related mental illness of drivers in African continent. In a National Transport Statistics Report (2022) common experiences in trucking were found to be, but not limited to, loneliness (27.9 per cent of drivers), depression (26.9 per cent), and anxiety (14.5 per cent). The reports above reflect the fact that many across the industry need mental health support. For many organisations, the need for support to create positive mental health in and through work, is clear and calls for a mental health framework to harness performance in the industry.

Following the launch of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness in 2017, there has been increasing interest in the ways in which management can reduce loneliness of freight drivers in the United Kingdom. Although

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none of the reviews returned in the current search addressed loneliness directly, many related transport effects were discussed, including connectedness, isolation, and social exclusion. In addition, in their review of transport and wellbeing, Reardon and Abdullah (2023) note that being part of a social group and having the ability to take part in wider community activity are strong determinants of wellbeing which most professional freight drivers are lacking due to long distance driving across countries. Boniface (2022) reviewed the impact of transport on social interactions and health. The author's findings confirm the findings by Mindell (2023) that indicated that community severance can contribute to quality of life and social cohesion, as well as social exclusion. Mackett and Thoreau (2022) investigated how transport contributes to social exclusion of freight drivers and subsequently mental health, and how transport interventions can help address this. They found that specific subgroups are more at risk of transport-related social exclusion than others; for example, transport-related social exclusion can be detrimental to anyone's mental health as it can make one feel isolated or dependent on others.

Although abundant evidence suggests that freight transport workers are at high risk of poor mental health, there is no consensus on the exposures that explain these outcomes, nor on the effectiveness of mental health interventions in this occupational group (Besiou et al., 2022; Martinez et al., 2022). Numerous studies have associated the occupational risks of freight drivers with the physical and mental health of workers. Most of the available evidence, focused on truck drivers, suggests that freight drivers' working conditions are associated with cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, and gastrointestinal diseases, psychological stress, anxiety, and depression (Evans, 2019; Kompier & Di Martino, 2019; Ragland et al., 2020; Tse et al., 2022). These health outcomes are caused by direct endocrine and metabolic reactions to environmental exposures (e.g. physical and chemical hazards) (Golinko et al., 2020; Gromadzi´nska & Wąsowicz, 2019), or more commonly by chronic stress-related psychophysiological wear (i.e. allostatic load) (Juster et al., 2020). In turn, impaired mental health reduces attentional capacity and psychomotor control, which are essential resources for safe performance in freight transportation-related tasks such as driving, and traffic control (Taylor & Dorn, 2019). Building on the accumulated knowledge about occupational exposures of freight

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drivers, some interventions to improve their mental health have focused on both risk removal and stress management skills (Kompier et al., 2020). However, the growing evidence on the occupational risks of freight drivers has not generated the expected increase in the production of evidence-based interventions and evaluative research (Tse et al., 2022), which to date remain scarce.

In previous literature reviews, four studies reported that long distance freight drivers have a greater risk for stress-related mental disorders which, in turn, are associated with absenteeism, sick leave, and negative safety outcomes (Evans, 2020; Kompier & Di Martino, 2020; Ragland et al., 2021; Tse et al., 2022). Additionally, two systematic reviews (Clarner et al., 2022; Carey et al., 2022) have found that the exposure to traumatic events on long distance freight transportation, such as suicide and violence, increases the risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. These findings consistently suggest that mental disorders represent high economic and health burdens for the long distance freight transportation drivers. Nevertheless, previous review studies have three key limitations: they focused exclusively on the working conditions and mental health outcomes of freight drivers, avoiding comparisons between occupational groups, they focused primarily on the outcomes of occupational exposures, without examining the effectiveness of intervention studies, and most of them (Evans, 2020; Kompier & Di Martino, 2020; Ragland et al., 2021; Tse et al., 2022) used quasi-systematic methodological designs (i.e. without an explicit research protocol), which makes them irreproducible and vulnerable to selection and interpretation bias (Pae, 2022). To overcome the limitations of previous literature reviews, this study sought to develop a mental health framework to enhance the performance of long distance freight drivers in the Zimbabwean transport sector.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, transport corridors are essential for local economies due to lack of waterways and inadequate rail services. Because of the transcontinental nature of the transport industry, health programmes prioritising truck drivers require complementary national healthcare policies (Besiou et al., 2022; Martinez et al., 2022). Transport workers, such as truck drivers, have specific healthcare needs. Globally, they bear a disproportionate health burden, including high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI), cancer, cardiovascular

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diseases, chronic conditions (predominantly diabetes, obesity, backache, leg pains), respiratory diseases, and an array of mental health conditions (with the most common being depression, anxiety, chronic insomnia, personality disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder) (Besiou et al., 2022; Martinez et al., 2022). Occupational factors that increase risk include irregular schedules, sedentary lifestyle due to long hours of driving/sitting, musculoskeletal and other injuries due to loading and unloading cargo, exposure to road accidents and deaths, extended periods of social isolation, unhealthy food choices on the road and poor access to healthcare (Kanyepe, 2022).

The freight transport industry in Zimbabwe is predominantly privately-run and has attracted international donor and domestic funding for work-related programmes tackling different aspects of truck drivers' health needs (Makurumidze et al., 2020). Increasingly, implementation has been proceeding across the region of healthcare programmes prioritising truck drivers (Makurumidze et al., 2020). Nevertheless, further planning for efficient implementation, scale-up, and sustainability of healthcare programmes for truck drivers in Zimbabwe is hindered by knowledge gaps about this population's needs and the impact of existing healthcare services on health outcomes (Makurumidze et al., 2020).

Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and the 2013 National Transport Policy emphasise the urgent need for an integrated transport infrastructure network to be put in place to support the country's economic growth towards Vision 2030 for Zimbabwe to become an upper middle-income economy (Ministry of Transport, 2023). At present, road transport accounts for over 95% of cargo freight and passenger movement and is considered an important driver of economic growth. The transport sector's contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated at 2.1% in the financial year 2018/2019 (Ministry of Transport, 2023). According to MOTID and TSCZ, Zimbabwe has seven principal pieces of legislation and standards that provide powers and authority for road safety management and monitoring: (a) Roads Act 13:12; Road Traffic Act 13:11; (b) Statutory Instrument (S.I.) 309 of 1985 (Road Traffic Regulations, 1985); (c) Road Motor Transportation Act: 13:15; (d) Vehicle Registration and Licensing Act 13:14; (e) Toll-Roads Act 13:13, and (f) Traffic Safety Council Act 13: 17. Policy and strategy documents include the Zimbabwe National Transport Policy, 2013, and the Zimbabwe National Transport Master Plan, 2014.

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However, TSCZ official statistics show an increase in road traffic crash fatalities of 35% between 2010 (1,291 fatalities) and 2019 (2,000 fatalities). Five people die every day on the roads in Zimbabwe and this translates to 153 persons killed per month. Estimates by TSCZ research in 2018 showed that the country loses about US$ 406 million annually from an average 40,000 road traffic accidents every year, and this is estimated to be almost 3% of the gross domestic product, estimated at US$ 14 billion. Long and irregular hours, delivery schedules, limited access to facilities, isolation, being away from home and family, amongst other factors, can all contribute to stress, and can affect concentration and, therefore, performance and safety. Long and irregular hours, delivery schedules, limited access to facilities, isolation, being away from home and family, amongst other factors, can all contribute to stress, and can affect concentration and therefore performance and safety. For many organisations, the need for support to create positive mental health in and through work, is clear. This study, therefore, sought to develop a mental health framework to enhance the performance of professional freight drivers in Zimbabwe transport sector.

The freight transport sector in Zimbabwe contributes signicantly to economic growth by a 15 percent margin of Growth Domestic Product (GDP) (Makurumidze et al., 2020; Kanyepe, 2022 and MOTID, 2023). Despite the importance of the freight transport sector in contributing to economic growth, it was experiencing massive under-performance in Zimbabwe. A survey done indicated that mental health issues were the major catalyst of timeous discharge of duties and road carnages (National Transport Statistics, 2022). In a recent survey, it was found that 19.4% of Zimbabwean freight professional drivers surveyed were experiencing mental health issues (Finscope Survey, 2022). The National Transport Statistics Report (2022) reveals that common experiences in trucking were found to be, but not limited to, loneliness (27.9 per cent of drivers), depression (26.9 per cent), and anxiety (14.5 per cent). Additionally, professional freight drivers have specific healthcare needs but they bear a disproportionate health burden, including high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI), cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic conditions (predominantly diabetes, obesity, backache, leg pains), respiratory diseases, and an array of mental health conditions (with the most common being depression, anxiety, chronic insomnia,

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personality disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder) (Makurumidze et al., 2020; Kanyepe, 2022). Often, problems arise due to long working hours, pressure to meet deadlines, and time spent away from family. This reflects the fact that many across the industry need mental health support. The need for support to create positive mental health in and through work, is clear and calls for the need for a mental health framework to enhance the performance of professional drivers in the freight transport industry.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, transport corridors are essential for local economies due to lack of waterways and inadequate rail services. Because of the transcontinental nature of the transport industry, health programmes prioritising truck drivers require complementary national healthcare policies (Besiou et al., 2022; Martinez et al., 2022). Transport workers, such as truck drivers, have specific healthcare needs. Globally, they bear a disproportionate health burden, including high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI), cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic conditions (predominantly diabetes, obesity, backache, leg pains), respiratory diseases, and an array of mental health conditions (with the most common being depression, anxiety, chronic insomnia, personality disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder) (Besiou et al., 2022; Martinez et al., 2022). Occupational factors that increase risk include irregular schedules, sedentary lifestyle due to long hours of driving/sitting, musculoskeletal and other injuries due to loading and unloading cargo, exposure to road accidents and deaths, extended periods of social isolation, unhealthy food choices on the road and poor access to healthcare (Kanyepe, 2022).

Aim

The main aim of the study was to assess the effectiveness of mental health strategies on the performance of drivers in the road freight transport sector in Harare Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted Cohen and Wills' (1986) Social Support and Stress-Buffering Theory as its core theoretical framework to explore how social support mechanisms influence mental health outcomes among freight transport drivers in Zimbabwe. The theory asserts that social support, whether emotional, instrumental, informational, or appraisal-based, plays a critical role in either directly enhancing psychological wellbeing or buffering the adverse effects of stress. Within high-stress environments such as

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long-haul freight transport, the presence of consistent, reliable support can significantly mitigate psychological strain, improve resilience, and promote mental stability.

In the Zimbabwean context, freight drivers operate under multiple stress-inducing conditions: long and irregular hours, physical exhaustion, isolation, family separation, lack of access to health or rest facilities, and minimal organisational support. These pressures are exacerbated by a broader socio-economic landscape marked by economic uncertainty, poor labour protections, and a prevailing cultural stigma surrounding mental health. Against this backdrop, Cohen's theory is especially pertinent, providing a structured lens through which to understand how access to supportive relationships whether from family, peers, employers, or community can act as a protective psychological buffer.

The theory informed the design of the interview guide and the thematic analysis of the data, allowing the researcher to examine how drivers appraised stress, accessed or lacked support, and coped with mental health challenges.

The integration of this theory also aligns with and complements broader occupational health models such as the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, both of which emphasise the interaction between high demands and limited coping resources. In this way, the Social Support and Stress-Buffering Theory provided both a diagnostic and prescriptive framework, illuminating the critical role that support networks play in maintaining mental health and guiding recommendations for sector-specific interventions. In sum, the application of Cohen's theory enriched the study's analysis and recommendations by linking mental health resilience to relational infrastructure. It underscores the need for Zimbabwe's freight transport sector to institutionalise support structures such as peer support programmes, counselling access, and organisational empathy, while also addressing the socio-cultural and structural barriers that prevent drivers from seeking help. Ultimately, the theory provided a powerful foundation for understanding the complex interplay between stress, support, and wellbeing, and informed a roadmap for promoting mental health in an often-overlooked but economically vital workforce.

METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy

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The current study is underpinned by the interpretivist research philosophy, which stems from the broader tradition of constructivism and is particularly aligned with qualitative methodologies. Interpretivism posits that reality is socially-constructed, subjective, and best understood through the meanings that individuals assign to their experiences (Schwandt, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In contrast to positivism which assumes an objective reality that can be measured using standardised instruments, interpretivism is concerned with understanding the complex, context-bound, and evolving nature of human experience. In the context of this research which explores the mental health and lived experiences of freight drivers in Zimbabwe, an interpretivist stance is not only appropriate but essential. Mental health is a deeply personal and socially-influenced phenomenon. The way drivers understand and respond to occupational stress, isolation, and emotional strain cannot be fully captured through numerical metrics alone. These experiences are subjective, contextually embedded, and shaped by personal histories, social relations, and cultural narratives.

Research Approach

This study was guided by qualitative research approach. Specifically, the qualitative component enabled the researcher to explore participants' lived experiences, emotions, and personal narratives surrounding mental health and occupational wellbeing. This was essential in uncovering subjective meanings, contextual factors, and the reasoning behind participants' attitudes and behaviours (Beins & McCarthy, 2012).

Research Design

The study was underpinned by a phenomenological case study. Phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences, which aligns well with investigating how truck drivers experience mental stress, isolation, and fatigue (Johnson & Schaltegger, 2016). The present study adopted an integrated phenomenological case study research design to explore the lived experiences of freight transport drivers in relation to mental health and wellbeing. This hybrid approach is justified on both methodological and epistemological grounds, as it allows for a deep, contextually grounded examination of subjective experience while maintaining analytical focus on a defined setting or "case.

Population

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The population of the study was all 20 freight drivers from registered commercial trucks companies who have been in operation for the past 10 years and were purposively selected due to their experiences and exposure in the business in Harare Metropolitan Province. The total number of freight drivers in this category was retrieved from the 2025 company database.

Sampling Techniques

Non-probability (purposive) sampling was used for this study, allowing for the intentional selection of participants who possessed rich, relevant experience within the freight transport sector. Purposive sampling is well-suited for qualitative research as it facilitates in-depth exploration of specific phenomena from the perspective of those most affected (Patton, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were selected based on criteria such as role, work experience, and reported exposure to work-related mental health challenges, ensuring the sample reflected a diversity of insights essential for understanding the complexity of the issue.

Sample Size

A total of 20 freight drivers was selected. This sample size is justified based on the principles of qualitative sufficiency and data saturation, rather than statistical representation. In qualitative research, the emphasis is on depth of insight, not breadth, and smaller samples are often sufficient to generate rich, detailed, and meaningful data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), data saturation, the point at which no new themes emerge, can often be reached with as few as 12 to 20 participants, particularly in studies with a relatively homogenous participant group and a focused research objective. Given that the participants in this study shared a common occupational background and were selected purposively based on criteria related to their experience of mental health challenges in the freight transport sector, a sample of 20 was sufficient to achieve thematic saturation while still allowing for variation in experiences across age, employment type, and route geography. Furthermore, a sample of this size ensures feasibility for in-depth data collection and analysis using methods such as semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, which require intensive engagement with each data unit. This aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, which prioritises quality of understanding over quantity of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

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Data Generation Instruments

To collect qualitative data, the study employed an interview guide comprising semi-structured, open-ended questions. This tool was designed to facilitate in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses regarding mental health and occupational wellbeing within the freight transport sector. The semi-structured format allowed for consistency across interviews, ensuring that all participants addressed key thematic areas while also providing the flexibility to probe, clarify, and follow emergent lines of inquiry based on individual responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Using an interview guide is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm, as it enables the researcher to engage meaningfully with participants and co-construct knowledge through dialogic interaction. This approach enhanced both the credibility and transferability of the data by allowing participants to express their experiences in their own words, while still maintaining alignment with the overarching research themes.

Data Presentation and Analysis Procedure

The qualitative data collected through interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was selected for its suitability in capturing the complexity of subjective experiences while remaining grounded in the raw data. Thematic analysis allowed for systematic coding, categorisation, and interpretation of the narratives provided by freight drivers regarding their mental health and occupational challenges.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was upheld at every stage of this study, in alignment with established research ethics protocols. The researchers adhered to the core ethical principles of honesty, truthfulness, accuracy, respect, and responsibility throughout the research process — from study design to data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully briefed on the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any stage, and the measures in place to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no form of coercion was used. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to protect their identities, and data were

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securely stored in accordance with institutional data protection policies. The researchers were committed to ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of findings by representing participants' views faithfully, without distortion or misinterpretation. In line with ethical guidelines from Creswell and Poth (2018) and the Belmont Report (1979), the study maintained a focus on beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and respect for persons. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to the commencement of the study.

RESULTS

The study findings were drawn from the themes generated from the major objective of the study which sought to assess the effect of mental health strategies on performance of road freight drivers operating in Zimbabwe. However, data saturation was reached at the 11th participant and the researchers stopped further collection. The response rate then was translated to 55 %, which is also recommended for data validation.

Various responses were given on the effect of mental health strategies on performance of road freight drivers operating in Zimbabwe.

Participant 1 asserted:

Organizations must step outside their traditional roles and comfort zones to look at new ways of working. They have to create a work environment where drivers enjoy what they do, feel like they have a purpose, have pride in what they do, and can reach their potential. Conversely this will work out as a mental health strategy to minimize stress.

Participant 2 revealed:

Companies in the transport sector need to adopt and implement tele-health services. Tele-mental health has proven to be effective in managing common mental health disorders. Effectiveness of videoconferencing psychotherapy for the treatment of depression and anxiety disorder revealed a promising outcome in reducing depressive and improving anxiety symptoms which is needed for all freight drivers to improve on operational performance.

Participant 3 averred:

Social connection strategy harness operational performance of drivers if it is well established and controlled. Social groups provide us with an important part of our identity, and more than that, they teach us a set of skills that help us prosper in a complex environment. Feeling socially

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connected, especially in an increasingly isolated world, is more important than ever. Embracing social connections is a powerful way to safeguard our health. Physically, these connections can ward off serious conditions like heart disease, stroke, and dementia, while also bolstering immunity. On the mental front, strong social bonds correlate with lower stress, anxiety, and depression levels, improved sleep, and heightened resilience during life's challenges. Moreover, happiness, self-esteem, empathy, healthy eating, and physical activity all thrive in the company of satisfying social relationships.

Participant 4 also said:

Implementing stress management strategy by our organisations is a necessity in the discharge of our duties as long distance drivers. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) need to be adopted to alleviate stress and enhance mental health is a need to our work environment. CBT sessions effectively lessened depressive and anxiety symptoms. With the help of CBT, employees can recognise and challenge unhelpful thought patterns, change unhealthy behaviour, and improve their coping mechanisms. These strategies encourage calmness and wellbeing by triggering the body's relaxation response and bringing down heart rate and reduces burnout and stress related diseases like fatigue and anxiety due to loneliness of long distance driving.

Participant 5 commented:

… Suggest that practices or the introduction of work life balance (WLB) supportive culture mental health strategy could influence job satisfaction and organizational commitment among us long distance road freight drivers. In the practices of WLB culture, family-supportive supervisor behaviors could play an important role, supervisor behaviors are expected to influence outcomes related to one's performance.

Participant 6 added:

There is need to adopt mindfulness meditation mental health strategy among those affected. The main importance of mindfulness meditation is teaching people how to cope with the stress. Also, mindfulness meditation is effective for coping with feelings of depression. Mindfulness can address problems such as low moods, lack of meaning in life, feeling lonely; as a result, it can be considered as a solution for depression. That change in cognitive thinking

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process can decrease one's anxiety. Finally, one of the contributions of meditation is helping people to become relaxed.

Participant 7 and 11 commented:

Another strategy that can be used for decreasing the negative effects of the mental health of drivers is digital detox. At this point, the necessity of digital detox should be considered because a digital detox can be employed for sustaining a healthy life balance between real life and artificial life by disconnecting from the digital devices to spend more time in real world… I realized that I not only became happier, I was also feeling freer than before.

Digital detox has helped me become independent of these devices. Maybe it was one of the reasons that made me happy, but that was not the only reason that made me happier. With the digital detox, I found a chance to observe some of my close friends and then I realized that none of them were as perfect as they have been seen on social media.

Participant 8 and 10 also commented:

Transport is a mental health issue, because we are increasingly coming to understand that mental wellbeing is strongly shaped by social and physical environments.

The concept of the 'therapeutic landscape' is central to contemporary approaches to mental health. It acknowledges that environments matter: that the design of mental health spaces creates or contracts opportunities for connection, comfort, restoration and recovery.

DISCUSSION

The study results were in line with literature where researchers concur that mental health issues need to be taken seriously in all organisations to harness operational performance. Despite recent improvements in many domains of physical health, psychological distress and mental illness are increasing in organisations and affecting performance (UNDP, 2020). The relationship between employee mental health and job performance has been one of the key concerns in workplace. However, extant studies suffer from incomplete results due to their focus on developed economies' contexts and the unclear path of employee mental health's impact on employee job satisfaction and performance. Employee mental health has long been a topic of concern for researchers and practitioners alike (Kelloway, 2019). One reason for this interest is that employee mental health is increasingly prominent within workplaces,

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which leads to significant costs including absenteeism, burnout, employee compensation claims, work–family conflict and low productivity (Kelloway, 2019). Recent studies have shown the relationship between employee mental health and different organisational outcomes, including employee emotional expression, job satisfaction, daily work behavior, job performance and firm performance (Cao, Zhang, Li & Huang, 2023). Scholars suggest that employees with good mental health will show a positive working state and devote themselves to work tasks with more enthusiasm (Ford, Cerasoli, Higgins & Decesare, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the study concludes that a constellation of occupational stressors including long and irregular working hours, rigid delivery schedules, limited access to rest and hygiene facilities, prolonged isolation, and extended periods away from home and family collectively contribute to heightened levels of psychological distress among freight transport drivers. These stressors not only undermine drivers' mental health but also compromise their concentration, cognitive functioning, overall performance, and road safety outcomes. The cumulative effect of these factors reveals a systemic gap in how mental health is conceptualised, prioritised, and managed within the freight transport sector in Zimbabwe.

The study, therefore, recommends that organisations across the freight and logistics industry must prioritise mental health as a core operational concern, not merely a peripheral welfare issue. There is an urgent need for the institutionalization of support mechanisms that promote positive mental wellbeing in and through work. This includes proactive mental health education, the provision of counselling and peer support systems, the redesign of shift structures, and improved access to rest and recovery infrastructure. Furthermore, the findings underscore the need for the development of a context-specific mental health model tailored to the unique occupational realities of the freight transport sector in Zimbabwe. Such a model should integrate organisational psychology, occupational health, and human resource best practices to enhance both employee wellbeing and operational performance. By aligning mental health promotion with productivity goals, organisations stand to benefit from reduced

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absenteeism, improved decision-making, safer driving practices, and enhanced employee retention. In conclusion, fostering a mentally healthy workforce is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for the sustainable development of Zimbabwe's freight transport sector.

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