

Low back pain and fatigue in commercial drivers

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Fatigue is generally defined as a feeling of lack of energy or motivation and its cause can be either physical, mental or both. A physical basis has been estimated to be responsible from 20 to 60% of the time, while emotional or mental causes contribute the other 40 to 80% of cases. Low Back Pain (LBP) primarily affects adults between 30 and 60 years of age, and has a tremendous impact on worker productivity, resulting in significant economic consequences. Among people younger than 45 years of age, persistent back pain ranks as the leading cause of disability among chronic ailments. Risk factors for low back pain are still being actively researched, but the most consistent findings includes a history of previous LBP, heavy lifting, pushing, pulling, and vibration encountered while driving. Poor job satisfaction, smoking, and family history also seem to predispose to future back problems. While there have been many studies documenting the impact of fatigue on commercial driver safety, and identifying low back pain as a common complaint among drivers, there have been no specific studies exploring the relationship between low back pain and fatigue.

Research Question: Is there an association between low back pain (LBP) and fatigue in commercial drivers.

Methods: Data from an anonymous survey of 90 current commercial drivers was obtained. Low Back Pain was assessed by the Oswestry Disability Index (ODI) and Fatigue was measured by the Brief Fatigue Inventory (BFI). Multiple linear regression (MLR) was used to examine the association between LBP and fatigue.

Results: Sample included 65 males and 25 females aged 24-70 Y (mean: 43.5, SD: 11.5). Length of driving time: 1-50 Y (mean: 14.0, SD: 10.1). Miles driven per week: 25 - 4500 (mean 1200). MLR showed that increased low back pain is a significant predictor of fatigue when adjusted for age, sex, BMI, and years driven ($p < 0.001$). No significant association was found between fatigue and age, sex, BMI, or number of years driven.

Biography

Amarilda Christensen is a senior resident in Occupational Medicine at Loma Linda University, She has earned an MPH degree in Occupational and Environmental Health at Loma Linda School of Public Health. Her primary research focus is in low back pain and its effect on occupational performance.

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