

Occupational health and extended working lives in the transport sector

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The average age of the working population in the UK is increasing, and people are now more likely to work to an older age. Increasing the number of years spent at work, extending working lives, is something that is evident across many sectors. However, evidence about the implications of working into older age is relatively scarce, and there are gaps in knowledge and understanding regarding the potential health and safety impacts.

The purpose of this study was to gather evidence about the health effects of working into older age, by focusing on the transport and logistics sector. Interviews were carried out with professional drivers of heavy goods vehicles (HGV) aged over fifty, and those who manage or supervise them.

A recurrent finding was that the work of a professional HGV driver in the UK is likely to involve long, unsociable hours, high physical and mental demands, and often long periods of sedentary work. The adverse health consequences of these factors were reported to be musculoskeletal disorders, stress, tiredness and fatigue, and issues associated with being overweight. However, having an appropriate amount of physical work was believed to be beneficial in helping drivers to remain fit and strong, and to keep their weight down, as they continued to work into older age.

This study provides valuable insights into the health impact of the changing world of work, as individuals work into older age. Reports from study participants highlight the importance of appropriate management of working hours and physical tasks for older workers. They also indicate that any employer interventions to support older workers may need to look beyond these individual factors and consider how the wider social and cultural aspects of work might also be adapted.

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Occupational health and extended working lives in the transport sector

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KEY MESSAGES

The average age of the working population in the UK is increasing, and people are now more likely to work into older age. Increasing the number of years spent at work, extending working lives, is evident across many sectors. However, evidence about the implications of this is relatively scarce, with gaps in knowledge and understanding regarding the potential health and safety impacts (both positive and negative).

The purpose of this study was to gather evidence about the health effects of working into older age, by focusing on the UK logistics and transport sector where the average age is increasing, and recruitment is proving challenging. The Freight Transport Association anticipates that current skill shortages for heavy goods vehicle (HGV) drivers will continue. This is something that may potentially increase demands on existing workers, and possibly impact negatively on their health. Musculoskeletal disorders are already a significant problem for the sector and there is potential for these to become a bigger issue as the average age of the workforce continues to increase; with older workers already being more likely to have multiple health conditions.

The impact of work on the health of HGV drivers, as they continue to work into older age, was explored via qualitative interviews with drivers and managers / supervisors in five logistics companies. These participants provided a range of perceptions about work, ageing and health:

- The work of a professional HGV driver was described as involving long unsociable hours, often with high physical and mental demands, and long periods of sedentary work. All of these can have adverse health consequences for workers, such as musculoskeletal disorders; stress; tiredness and fatigue; and issues associated with being overweight.
- High physical demands were reported where loading and unloading tasks were carried out. These tasks were reported to have become harder as drivers aged.
- Stress was believed to result in instances where a driver is under constant time pressures, within a working environment with increased traffic and delays on the roads.
- Experience was found to be an important factor in enabling older drivers to cope with the mental pressures of their job; although did not appear to mitigate against injuries sustained from manual tasks.
- The wider working environment and any associated health issues were likely to be accepted as part of the job of a driver; with an under-reporting of health issues suggested to be likely.

Evidence from the literature highlights that failure to retain the skills and experience of older professional HGV drivers may have implications for the future growth of the industry. Employers, along with customers and the wider UK logistics working environment, have an important role to play in ensuring that work is not having a negative impact on the health of this ageing cohort of workers. Key considerations are appropriate management of working hours and physical tasks.

This research has shown that employer interventions to support the health of this cohort of workers might focus on providing opportunities to take physical activity during the working day and improving access to healthy food. However, it is also important to consider how the wider social and cultural aspects of the industry might be adapted to support good health as people work into older age.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The UK logistics and transport sector is experiencing an increase in the average age of their workforce. There is evidence that, when compared to other occupations, the work of professional drivers is disproportionately detrimental to health. Additionally, evidence suggests that the health and safety performance of the UK logistics sector is worse than average; with musculoskeletal disorders being a significant health problem. At present, the literature contains little evidence about the effects of work, on professional drivers' health as they continue to work in to older age. Hence, the aim of this study was to fill a gap in knowledge about the positive and negative health implications of working into older age, and to provide evidence to support delivery of HSE's logistics and transport sector strategy.

Method

A qualitative study was undertaken in five medium to large logistics companies. Interview participants were male HGV drivers aged over fifty (n=14), and those who manage HGV drivers across a range of ages (n=7). Interview questions were designed to explore the impact of the working environment on health over an extended working life. Data was analysed, and has been reported, thematically in line with Government Social Research guidelines.

Results

The tasks undertaken, distances travelled, and hours worked by the drivers taking part in the study differed. This appeared to influence the amount of work-related physical activity they did in a shift, and there were estimates of drivers' being sedentary, sitting down driving or waiting, for up to ninety percent of their time, in what might be a fourteen hour shift.

The haulage industry was reported to be constantly changing, with improvements to vehicles, equipment, and greater use of technology. Interview participants had observed an increase in the number of vehicles on the roads, and believed that the introduction of the driver certificate of professional competence (CPC), which mandates thirty-five hours of classroom learning for drivers every five years, had been a key change that has influenced people joining and leaving the industry. The cabs of the vehicles were reported to be better designed for comfort, with more automatic systems such as power steering, automatic gears and braking. These automatic systems might be believed to make driving physically easier, but to take control away from the driver. Technology in the cab, with lights and visual displays, was reported to be a potential distraction, and believed to increase the mental demands of the job. In instances where tracking technology and cameras were fitted to a vehicle, this may result in a driver feeling under constant surveillance and increased pressure. There was a belief that adapting to the introduction of new technology may take a bit longer for those, likely to be older workers, who might be less familiar with it.

There were reports from drivers about finding the physical side of work harder as they aged, although it was suggested that they can become better at coping with mental demands of the job; such as anticipating dangerous behaviour from other road users. Fatigue and tiredness due to the long working hours (exacerbated by volumes of traffic, delays on the roads, and lengthy waits at

delivery sites) were recurring issues, which drivers might cope with by taking things more slowly; due to their awareness of the risks associated with driving whilst tired.

Getting delayed on the roads (due to increased traffic, road works and diversions) was a work-related factor that was identified as a potential stressor for drivers. This was a particular issue in instances where drivers were under pressure to deliver within a specific time window, and if they were being pushed by their managers to meet this. However, there was a perception that this pressure could be alleviated by understanding management who planned work carefully, and also by drivers using their experience to cope with pressure. Whilst drivers accepted that traffic came with the job, they were less accepting of the time they could be kept waiting at delivery sites, as this can add hours to their shift and increase tiredness. Another stressor was not knowing if they would get home at the end of a shift, or have to sleep in the cab, and the impact of this on family life.

The main aspects of work, reported to have had a negative impact on drivers' physical health, were manual tasks; sedentary activities; shift work; long hours and issues within the wider working environment such as access to healthy food. Long and irregular hours, which result in difficulty getting regular, healthy meals, were reported to be one of the biggest problems with the job, and something that was believed to not just contribute to tiredness, but to drivers gaining weight and potentially developing health issues such as diabetes. Tiredness was reported to be a particular issue for those who worked night shifts, and whilst there was no indication that this affected drivers' work, it did have a negative effect on their domestic and social lives. There were reports of domestic life having a negative impact on work, with stress arising from issues with children and elderly parents, and day time noise from neighbours or children impacting on sleep and exacerbating tiredness. Stress disorders resulting from previous service in the armed forces were also perceived to have a potentially negative effect on a driver's response to their current work.

There were reports of musculoskeletal issues with shoulders, elbows, backs and knees, which can result from, or be exacerbated by, manual aspects of the job such as loading and unloading pallets and cages from vehicles, and from pulling the curtains on the sides of vehicles. However, there was also a belief that having some physical work activity, that does not exceed capability, is beneficial to health; as this helps to keep drivers fit and strong, and keep their weight down. Getting timely access to welfare facilities may be an issue for drivers, especially when travelling across country, or if delayed. It can also be an issue at destinations if facilities are poor or made unavailable to drivers. However, it was generally believed that this might only be an issue for those with existing health conditions, although no reference was made to possible issues relating to differences in gender.

There was evidence that drivers can accept the working environment, and any associated health issues, as part of the job. There was also a widely held view that physical health had not impacted on work. There were reports of how work had been adapted to accommodate any health needs. For example by changing tasks or shift patterns, and of drivers using coping strategies, such as taking more breaks to deal with tiredness and adapting their social lives.

Any effect that work might have on future health was perceived to be specific to each individual, and there was a belief that if physical tasks and working hours were managed, then a driver would be able to work to an older age. However, drivers acknowledged that haulage is not the healthiest of jobs, and anticipated that if they continued to work they would continue to put on weight, may suffer a heart attack or stroke, and have increased musculoskeletal issues. Their future retirement

plans varied, from wanting to continue working as long as they were still fit to do so, working reduced hours, and moving to work in a different job, to wanting to retire completely at a specific age. Plans were informed by drivers' financial situation, such as pension provision, need for income and fear of loss of income, and the extent to which they wanted to spend more time at home with family, or felt that they would not know what to do if they stopped working.

Things believed to help to improve drivers' health were better access to healthy hot food and understanding managers, who will manage workloads, relieve time pressures and offer flexible working or reduced working hours if needed to help alleviate tiredness. Managers might also ensure that equipment is in good working order and offer drivers less demanding work for a time when their health might require this. There was a general feeling that little could be done to reduce drivers' sedentary work; with differences in shift patterns, long hours, and restrictions at delivery sites being cited as barriers to increasing activity. However, providing health and exercise information, or a recreational area, were suggested as possible options. Managers monitored drivers' health via results from mandatory medicals, proactively talking to them, and having an open door policy for drivers to come and discuss health issues with them. Where a health intervention had been provided by companies, there were reports from managers of it being challenging to obtain engagement from drivers, as they are tired and just want to go home at the end of a shift.

Reasons given for encouraging people to join the industry and work as a HGV driver were that a driver always has work, and their own work space. However, it was described as a dangerous and unhealthy job, expensive to enter and maintain competency, with long unsociable hours, poor rewards and benefits, bad behaviour from others, often with high physical and mental demands; musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), tiredness, being overweight, and stress being key health issues.

As drivers aged, they wanted fewer hours, had a calmer attitude to work and felt the job had become less appealing. Regardless of age, all drivers were believed to be treated the same at work; although there were reports of greater demands for younger drivers and more respect for older drivers, due to their knowledge and experience. Overall drivers reported being generally happy with their working environment, although believed work could be better if pay and conditions were improved, and there was a reduction in working hours.

Conclusions

The literature indicates that it is important to retain the skills and experience of older HGV drivers; for the future of the logistics and transport sector. Drivers work long, unsociable hours, which can have a detrimental impact on their health as they age. Despite technological advances, drivers may still be exposed to high physical and mental demands at work. They may take responsibility for ensuring any existing health issues do not adversely impact on their work. However, haulage companies, their customers and the wider UK logistics working environment have an important role to play in ensuring that these drivers are not exposed to unnecessary health and safety risks at work.

Whilst the companies and participants taking part in this study were self-selecting, the resulting data covered both existing and past work experiences and thus provides a rich account about extending working lives and changes in health. In addition, the findings resonate with those from studies undertaken outside the UK, and may therefore be applicable to other settings and contexts where similar working conditions exist.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Evidence about working into older age is relatively scarce, as policymakers and researchers have only recently become interested in this topic. Hence, there are gaps in our knowledge and understanding about how extended working lives might impact on health and safety in the workplace.

As the average age of the working population increases it is likely that there will be greater prevalence of ill-health in the workforce, and that the nature of this will change, with a shift from acute illness towards chronic conditions, multi-morbidities, cognitive impairments and long-term frailty.

People are now more likely to continue working into older age (e.g. ONS, 2015), with many sectors experiencing an increase in the average age of their workforce; including the logistics and transport sector. The average age of a heavy good vehicle (HGV) driver in the UK has been increasing and is now around fifty (HGV training network, 2017; Freight Transport Association, 2017). It is estimated that the over sixty age group represent thirteen percent of all drivers, and only two percent are aged under twenty five (HGV training network, 2017).

There is a chronic shortage of qualified HGV drivers in the UK; which is a concern for the logistics industry, which employs 1.7 million people (HGV training network, 2017; Freight Transport Association, 2017). Introduction of the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence, which requires drivers to undertake thirty five hours of compulsory classroom based training over a five year period, is suggested to have contributed to this shortage, as it is costly for new drivers, and older drivers approaching retirement may not wish to go through the training hoops (HGV training network, 2017).

The literature contains little UK evidence about the effect of work on the health of professional drivers as they continue to work in to older age. However, there is evidence about truck driving from North America, Canada and Australia, where the wider working environment is likely to differ from the UK.

Evidence from North America indicates that long-haul truck driving is disproportionately, when compared to other occupations, detrimental to health and safety. The working environment of long-haul drivers in North America has been found to involve excess physical and psychological workloads, erratic schedules, disrupted sleep patterns and extreme time pressures. These work-induced stressors have been connected to excess risk for cardio-metabolic disease, certain cancers, and musculoskeletal and sleep disorders, as well as highway crashes (Apostolopoulous, Leme and Sonmez, 2014).

There is also evidence from Canada (McDonough et. al., 2014) regarding the workplace environment having a negative impact on health; with health risks exacerbated by job demands, work hours, financial pressure and the sedentary nature of the job. In this Canadian study, mental fatigue was found to be an accepted part of the job; with long hours being a barrier to participation in health promoting activities, as drivers were exhausted at the end of their shifts.

On the topic of sleep, an American study (Duffy, Zitting and Czeisler, 2015) refers to age-related differences in ability to maintain performance when sleep deprived; citing several laboratory studies

demonstrating, that when compared to sleep deprived younger adults, sleep deprived healthy older adults (without sleep disorders) are better at maintaining attention and performance.

An Australian study (Meuleners, Fraser, Govorko and Stevenson, 2015) found that, when compared to the general Australian population, drivers of heavy vehicles have much higher levels of obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA); with forty two percent of drivers having OSA compared to five percent of the general population. Those drivers with OSA were found to be over three times more likely to be involved in a crash than those without it. An American conference report on truck driver occupational health and safety (Saltzman and Belzer, 2007) describes OSA as the cessation of breathing for at least ten seconds when a sleeping person's airway closes. This condition is positively associated with obesity and large neck size (which are prevalent in truck drivers) and also with sleepiness. Other studies have reported that obesity is a common concern in professional drivers (Sieber et. al., 2014), and work has been carried out in Finland to address dietary patterns and physical activity in overweight truck and bus drivers (Puhkala et. al., 2016).

The wider social context within which drivers work can be one factor that impacts on their diet and exercise. For example, a study of UK lorry drivers (Caddick, 2017) found that the wider social and cultural context in which drivers are working places constraints on their opportunities for healthy living. This indicates that any interventions to improve health should focus on social and cultural, rather than individual factors. Other studies from the United States have also found that health promotion interventions tend to focus predominantly on making changes at an individual level (e.g. Lemke and Apostolopoulos, 2015), whilst failing to address environmental and work organisation factors.

The evidence set out above supports the case for undertaking research to address the health of professional drivers, particularly as they work into older age. The case is furthered by evidence of the UK logistics sector having a worse than average record for health and safety performance, with musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) being a significant health problem (HSE, 2016; HSE, 2017a; HSE, 2017b).

There are concerns (e.g. from the Road Haulage Association and the UNITE Union) about the health of the workforce (including sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy diets), an ageing workforce, and how safety culture and behaviours may be shifting. To date, HSE research in this sector has focused on safety, and there is a lack of evidence about health.

The findings set out in this report provide evidence to fill a knowledge gap and also to support delivery of HSE's Logistics and Transport sector action plan (strategy). This plan states that MSDs continue to pose significant health problems across the sector. It also groups other areas of importance for health around the effect of travelling, including welfare arrangements and fatigue.

The purpose of this study was to obtain insights about working into older age, and specifically what this means for health, in a changing world of work.

2 METHODS

2.1 AIM

To explore the impact of the physical working environment (*including welfare facilities*) on health (*including MSDs and mental wellbeing*) over an extended working life in the logistics and transport sector.

2.2 STUDY DESIGN

This was a qualitative study in five medium to large logistics companies. It involved interviews with HGV drivers and those who manage or supervise HGV drivers. A qualitative method was selected as this enables exploration of a topic and can provide a greater understanding about work and health.

2.3 THE SAMPLE

The sample was selected purposively to include HGV drivers aged fifty or over, as well as those who manage or supervise drivers aged over fifty. Participants were self-selecting from five companies that consented to take part in the study. The age of drivers ranged from fifty-one to sixty-eight and that of managers ranged from twenty-six to sixty-two. All participants were male. Drivers were all employed on a full-time permanent contract, with the exception of one full-time agency driver.

A total of twenty-one interviews were carried out. Fourteen face-to-face interviews took place with HGV drivers and seven interviews with managers or supervisors (four face to face and three telephone interviews).

The sample size was deemed sufficient to ensure a broad range and depth of views were captured and that no new information would have been obtained by carrying out additional interviews (i.e. theoretical saturation was achieved).

2.4 DATA COLLECTION

Two semi-structured interview guides were produced, one for managers/supervisors and one for drivers (Appendix 1). The interview questions were developed in consultation with key transport industry stakeholders, including unions, trade associations and transport professionals. The questions explored drivers' and managers/supervisors' views on a number of broad topics as follows:

Health and wellbeing (changes in health, effect of work on health and health on work)

Age (change in how work is experienced, and affects health, as drivers get older)

Interventions (how health is monitored and what can be done to improve health)

Joining and leaving work (why others would be encouraged to join the industry and why older workers leave)

Attitudes (age differences in treatment at work, and happiness with work environment)

Data was collected via face to face interviews at transport depots or via telephone. In advance of the interview, participants were provided with an information sheet about the project, and gave their consent to participate, including being audio-recorded. They were also given assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. All data was transcribed verbatim.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The research team met to review and reflect on the data during the data collection phase (following interviews with each company). During this process, initial themes and key issues from the interviews, were identified and discussed.

The transcribed data was analysed thematically in line with Government Social Research guidelines, using a systematic approach advocated by the National Centre for Social Research. This approach develops, refines and modifies an analytic (or thematic) framework, into which every piece of data is then systematically and consistently analysed. Two analytical frameworks were developed, one for managers/supervisors and one for drivers. These frameworks were informed by the research aim, the research topics, and by the key issues that were identified from the interview data.

In order to ensure that the data analysis accurately reflected participants' responses to all of the interview questions, data was entered into the frameworks from the verbatim transcripts. Inter-rater reliability checks were also carried out on the data in the framework in order to ensure completeness and consistency in the analysis.

The interpretation stage involved descriptive analysis (describing the data within a series of themes), in order to present the range and diversity of views given by participants.

3 RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The data from drivers and managers have been synthesised and are presented in thirteen main sections. These sections are broadly in line with the structure of the interviews, and contain themes that were identified within them.

Where similar views were expressed by both drivers and managers, these are combined within presentation of the results. Where there were differences in views between the two groups of participant, these were drawn out and reported separately. Where quotes from interview participants have been used, these are indented within the text and reported within double inverted commas.

3.2 BACKGROUND

The length of time that the employed drivers had been in their current roles varied from two to fifteen years (with one agency driver being in his current post for two months). They were all employed full-time, and the majority had worked as HGV drivers for over twenty years. Managers reported working in the logistics sector for between two and thirty six years, with three of them starting out in the sector as a HGV driver.

Drivers differed in the type of tasks that they were required to carry out as part of their job. They might be responsible for loading and unloading the vehicle or this might be done by others (e.g. by a forklift truck driver or warehouse staff). When loading and unloading a driver might be out of the vehicle and walking around wheeling pallets and cages, they might back into a bay and take the load off with an electric truck, or get out of the vehicle to open the curtains, then get back in and wait whilst others load or unload. There was a description of the job being predominantly sitting down and “steering”, with estimates of sedentary time of between fifty and ninety percent of a drivers shift, depending on the distances travelled and times between destinations / number of drops.

The number of hours in a shift was also reported to vary, from ten up to fifteen hours; with drivers being aware of those who worked seventy or eighty hour weeks. Shifts might start at two or three o'clock in the morning or run from two thirty in the afternoon until one or two o'clock in the morning. In one instance a driver had a regular ten hour day shunting in the yard to help manage his hours and diabetes, although as was the case with all of the drivers, he spoke about not only his current role, but experiences of his previous HGV driving role and past employers. Drivers generally reported that they worked a forty or forty five hour week, with rotas varying (forty-five hours on an eight-week rota with a five-day break or forty hours over four days in any seven days).

A manager explained how his company “double-shifts” the vehicles so that they run constantly night and day. Managers were all experienced in working with HGV drivers; with their roles varying from company directors, to health and safety managers and driver assessors / supervisors. Many of them managed both permanent and agency drivers at more than one location, across all age ranges, including those aged over fifty. The average age of drivers within the companies were cited as ranging from around forty five to fifty eight (with the oldest in one company reported to be seventy four).

3.3 CHANGES IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

This section sets out changes that participants had observed over the course of their working lives. These changes related to the wider working environment, to their respective companies, vehicles and technology.

3.3.1 Changes in experience of work with age

When asked whether their experiences of work had changed as they had got older, drivers spoke about wider change within the industry, changes to the vehicles, technology and change in attitudes towards HGVs. Managers also spoke about the vehicles and the impact of technology (which was believed to make manual aspects of the job easier, but to increase the mental demands).

The haulage industry was reported to be constantly changing, with better trucks and equipment, more technology, paperwork and procedures. However, facilities were believed to have remained the same:

“Facilities [in the UK] are the same, are not as good as abroad. Twenty pounds to park overnight here and you wouldn't eat half of the food. Showers you would not use.”

Reference was made to changes in working hours and an increase from eleven to fifteen hour shifts; with a belief that drivers were more likely to fall asleep at the wheel now. In addition, an increase in vehicles on the roads had been observed, with everybody believed to be in a rush “wanting to get there before they've left”. However, there were perceptions that drivers' experience enabled them to anticipate the behaviour of other road users. There was also a view that public perception of HGVs had deteriorated; with them going from being “knights of the road” to “big horrible things who are in everybody else's way”.

Managers also referred to changes that had been made to the vehicles to support older drivers to continue working:

"Our drivers are so keen to stay on after sixty-five I think, because we've made it fairly comfortable for them, we haven't quite put a stair lift to get them up in to the lorries yet, but we've done everything else we can do. All of our strapping systems are operated from the floor. They don't have to climb anywhere.”

Whilst managers spoke about positive changes in the working environment, it was acknowledged that drivers might “seem to hanker for the old days”.

3.3.2 Changes in the companies

Managers were asked about any changes that had taken place within their companies and the extent to which drivers were involved in them. They reported changes in technology, to the sites, to rotas and to the fleet of vehicles. There was a view that the job is not as dirty and manual as in the past. Apart from the technology and newer vehicles the key change that was discussed was the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) licence. This includes driving the Class 1 vehicles and 35 hours of classroom-based learning over a five-year period.

Changes such as those to fleet vehicles and rotas were predominantly taken at board level, and drivers were not generally consulted. Where drivers were not consulted prior to a change, the information would be disseminated to them, for example in a toolbox talk, and they would have opportunity to provide feedback.

There were instances where drivers got to test, and provide feedback on new vehicles:

“The company gets new demo trucks to test - and they [drivers] give feedback on what they would change to make it better e.g. the position of switches, steering wheel, seating, everything the driver touches and controls, the vision, looking in the mirrors etc.”

In instances where managers advised the board against making a change to the fleet and a change of vehicles was still implemented, this had resulted in new vehicles that are operationally described as a “nightmare” to use (participants did not elaborate on this point).

Managers reported that their companies had relatively new vehicles (less than three or four years old), and that these were better designed than the older vehicles, which drivers described as uncomfortable.

3.3.3 Changes in technology

Interview participants were asked about technological change at work and whether they believed it had any impact on their health. They spoke predominantly about changes to the vehicles, and to the technology within them, (as opposed to the impact of these changes), and whether they felt these technological advances were good or bad.

The cabs of the vehicles were believed to be better designed than in the past. For instance they were “designed to ensure maximum concentration through the windscreen” and with more comfortable, adjustable seats (which were believed to alleviate back problems).

Vehicles were reported to have automatic gearboxes, automated breaking systems, collision warnings, cruise control, lane warning systems, and power steering. Views varied in terms of whether these changes were good (or not so good), as well as differing about whether automatic vehicles make the job easier.

Whilst automatic gearboxes saved drivers the effort of going through sixteen forward gears, drivers felt that this is something that can take control away from them:

“You don’t feel like you're driving it, you're waiting for it to change gear, sometimes it does and you don't want it changed. It takes too long to select a gear, you come to a stop and if you’re just coming to a roundabout and you think oh I can go now, you press your accelerator and nothing happens. By the time it sets off somebody’s come right round.”

Managers, who had previously worked as HGV drivers, differed in their views about whether the job was now easier than in the past:

“Fifteen to twenty years ago there wasn't the technology and the vehicles were a lot more manual. There's a lot less to do to drive the vehicles now. They almost drive themselves. This is a good thing, and power steering takes a lot off you.”

Driving automatic vehicles was referred to as “sounding easy” but in fact it is not:

“You’ve still got to pull forty four tonnes and sometimes you have to go into manual mode to get it round a corner.”

“There’s a lot of mental stuff with driving because you’ve got all the technology in the cab.”

Drivers spoke about how the automated braking system prevents collision, for example if someone cut them up; although the system might make a different judgement to a driver. The automated system might also give drivers a feeling that they could go to sleep if they wanted to:

"So, you can go to sleep if you want, they steer in a straight line and it will stop if a car stops in front of you. It does work ...if you're following a car and it's turning off, and you know you're going to miss it, the braking radar, will think it's still...hang on, starts flashing and then slamming on, look it's gone you stupid thing."

The cabs were reported to contain technology to help keep drivers alert. A noise will alert drivers to the vehicle drifting out of lane, and a warning would “flash up” if it was getting too close to the vehicle in front (and if this collision warning was not acted upon, the automated system would start to slow down and brake). There was a belief that experiencing the automatic braking can be unnerving for someone unused to it.

Drivers generally described cruise control as “wonderful” and “fantastic”. However, there was a view that if a driver had “a heart attack or something” whilst using cruise control, and was unable to stop the vehicle, it would keep moving until it hit something big.

It was reported that companies might use the data from sensors fitted to the vehicle (e.g. to the braking system and accelerator) in order to assess driving style, and as a proactive tool for improving safety, as well as the efficiency of the vehicles.

Taken together, these changes meant that drivers might feel they just “sat there and steered”:

"You've nothing to do, not even changing gear because it does it for you. You become like in a tunnel vision. It's harder into the early hours of the morning."

With respect to the technology within the vehicles, drivers reported that they may need a while to get used to, and “get their head around”, the digital tachographs. They may have struggled with them at first; preferring the old paper disc system to write their name on, as it was “hands on”. Managers noted that drivers need to watch the tachograph, in order to ensure rules and regulations regarding breaks are complied with, and that this could be distracting.

Both drivers and managers felt that experienced drivers, who know where they are going, often don't need the satellite navigation systems (sat navs). They may “cover them with a hat”, just using them when needed, or prefer to use their A-Z. Negative aspects of sat navs were believed to be promoting laziness and being a distraction:

“sat nav is easy, it's nice, but it make our brains lazy.”

“If you're watching the sat nav, you're not watching the road.”

There was a view that sat navs are quite good, and a recollection about what it was like without them “driving round London with an A-Z in one hand and steering wheel in the other”.

Cameras in the cabs were described as being forward facing, and also backwards facing (towards the driver). Not all companies used the cameras facing the driver, although in one instance they were reported to be used to monitor drivers’ demeanour and behaviour, and to pick up any signs of stress. There was a view that drivers might feel “spied on” even if the cameras are not switched on; with reports of apple stickers being stuck over camera lenses to ensure they are not watched.

Drivers spoke about tracking devices and alarms in the vehicles, and how the office would know exactly where they are at any time, and if they were being attacked or highjacked:

“We just press [the alarm] and it comes straight through to [the office] and they can see exactly where we are.”

However, tracking devices were believed to present a distraction in instances where the depot would phone a driver, for example to ask why the vehicle had stopped, meaning that a driver would “want to turn it off” or “put a hat over it”.

The difference between use of phones by older and younger people was highlighted, with a belief that younger drivers may be more distracted by their phones as they “automatically look at it when it flashes”.

If the new technology within the cabs had a light in drivers’ peripheral vision this was something that could also be distracting. For example, a driver can use a screen to look through the mirrors:

“You can look [at the screen] or you can look through the mirrors, which I’ve been taught to use the mirrors more than the screen. So I actually found that not too bad for the first couple of hours, and because it was there constantly, it’s just there in your peripheral vision. I actually covered it over with a hat. It was just a constant light there. So, I suppose it was distracting, because we’re taught, and I’ve always used the mirrors to see what’s around me. So I don’t need the extra”.

There was a view that technology had not made the job any better, and that it had make the job slower in instances where old paper systems were still operated alongside new digital ones.

Perceptions on how people feel about technology

There was a range of perceptions about how people feel about new technology. For example, technology was believed to “unnerve some people”. There were differences in opinion about how drivers respond to learning how to use new technology. One view was that drivers’ concerns about learning new technology are:

“Nothing to do with their age, but their background and willingness to “get stuck in” [find out how it works and use it].”

However, a more recurrent view was that younger people find using new technology easier than older people who might be less familiar with it, and whose only experience of an electrical gadget in

their youth may have been a “battery operated calculator”. Hence, older people may take a bit longer to learn how to use the new technology:

“Because younger people are brought up with technology, e.g. they just pick a tablet up and do it. Older people think about it too much.”

“Older guys are less au fait with the technology, so have a bit more time with the driver trainer to get used to it.”

Observations from managers were that drivers get to a certain age without having had technology and think "why all of a sudden do they need it now". Despite all of the changes to the vehicles “more switches, more buzzers, more buttons, more lights flashing at you”, there was a belief that drivers do get used to it.

3.4 PHYSICAL HEALTH

The key changes in drivers’ health throughout their working lives related to their musculoskeletal system / physical strength and experiences of tiredness and fatigue. These working lives had invariably included working for different companies and undertaking different driving related roles.

The physical side of work was reported to have become harder as drivers had got older. For example, drivers felt that “everything seems heavier” and that they “can’t do the same” as when they were younger. There were recurrent reports of gaining weight and drivers being “heavier” than they wanted to be. Despite these changes, drivers might still consider themselves to be fit, and believe that the manual tasks involved in their work help to keep them fit and active.

Managers’ believed that you slow down as you get older, and that older drivers might have more ailments, take longer to recover, and carry more injuries (possibly resulting from previous working environments that were not as safe as they are today). However, it was acknowledged that this cannot be generalised to all older drivers; with one manager believing that older drivers can actually have fewer health issues than younger ones and that it is up to each individual to take care of their own health.

3.4.1 Changes in physical health

Managers believed that health changes that occur throughout drivers’ working life are: onset of arthritis, weight gain, high blood pressure, type II diabetes, reduction in flexibility and issues with sleep apnoea. Age-related deterioration in eyesight had also been observed by managers, with drivers having long range vision, but needing glasses for other tasks. Managers also mentioned musculoskeletal issues with knees, shoulders, elbows, fingers and backs. However, it was noted that whilst few drivers might report musculoskeletal issues to their companies, there was no doubt that these probably do exist, and that drivers are “just grinning and bearing it”.

Drivers also spoke about an increase in musculoskeletal issues, along with declines in their physical strength, and an increase in tiredness and provided detailed accounts of the changes.

3.4.2 Tiredness and fatigue

Tiredness was a recurrent issue discussed by the drivers, with a view that this was something that can increase with age:

"I think you get a bit more tired as you get a bit older. Easier, I think you tend to doze even when you're at home at weekends more than you would do when you're younger. I think that's a problem for people that are driving at my age, you do get more tired."

Being aware of tiredness, taking things more slowly, and trying to get sufficient sleep were changes that drivers noticed as they aged. If tired when on the road they were "more aware of the risks" than when younger, and for example would open the window and pull in at the next service station, set an alarm and have twenty minutes sleep:

"Rather than running the risk, you just think, well if I'm going to be late, I'm going to be late. So, I would actually pull over, just stop...the consequences [of not doing this] are too frightening to think about."

Drivers also spoke about there being more fatigue than in the past. This was attributed to an increase in traffic, waiting at depots "for hours on end" and "a lot more diversions on the motorways".

An increase in fatigue was also mentioned by managers, in conjunction with issues with concentration levels:

"My experience tells me that as you get older, you are more prone to fatigue on long shifts. Bear in mind that some of these guys are working twelve to fifteen-hour shifts, and night drivers as well, the concentration factor, as you get older it is more difficult."

Drivers also attributed tiredness to working shifts and long hours (Sections 3.5.3 and 3.5.4).

3.5 THE IMPACT OF WORK ON PHYSICAL HEALTH

There were contrasting views regarding whether work had caused or contributed to drivers' physical health issues or not. Certain physical changes in health were believed to result from the normal ageing process (such as changes to eyesight, reduction in flexibility, and development of arthritis) as opposed to being due to work. In addition, there were instances where problems with musculoskeletal health were attributed to drivers' physical activities outside of work (such as running and playing football).

There was a view that work context can influence drivers' health:

"There are certain conditions, ailments, injuries and illnesses that are specific to each individual role, or each individual contract, not just specifically to driving as a rule."

Interview participants spoke about health issues that, although not directly attributed to work, were believed to possibly be made worse by work, or to flare up because of work (for example back problems).

Aspects of drivers' work that were believed to have had an impact on health were: manual tasks, sitting for long periods of time, shifts, and working for long hours, and the wider working environment. There was a widely held belief that welfare facilities had not had an impact on drivers' health, although it was acknowledged that for some people they might do.

3.5.1 Manual tasks

Manual tasks involved in loading and unloading vehicles, such as pulling pallets, cages and curtains on the vehicles were things that drivers reported to be particular issues for them, and a potential risk to their health:

"Pushing and pulling the cages - sometimes the cage falls on top of you, you move, you hit your elbow."

"Most of the drivers have problems with their shoulder or elbow [because of the cages]."

One task that was repeatedly mentioned by both managers and drivers was operating the curtains on high curtain-sided vehicles. This was perceived to be a physically demanding task with risk of strain or injury:

"There is a little bit of repetitive movement, and possibly strain. Occasionally if one of the curtains gets stuck the driver might slightly pull his back. There's always the risk of injury wherever there is any manual work involved."

Whilst injury was believed to be highly unlikely, due to safe systems of work to protect drivers, there was a belief that there might be instances where injury could occur:

"Drivers can pull their shoulder. In high winds, they've pulled the curtain and a high gust of wind's took it out of their arms."

"Managing a forty foot long sail [the curtain], if the wind is strong enough, that can pose a significant risk."

In addition to issues with elbows and shoulders, problems with backs and knees were also reported:

"Sometimes your knees ache and that, but it's because of all the moving around unloading and stuff."

"When I was younger I used to get blokes, the older blokes, telling me, stop jumping off that trailer, your knees, stop jumping off that trailer. I can hear them now."

There was an element of acceptance amongst the drivers that these issues were just part and parcel of the job:

"[Loading and unloading is the problem], after that if you sit a long time you have problems with your spine. That's the life of the driver."

"If driving is all you know - all you can do - you continue working - you live with the health issues."

3.5.2 Sedentary work

Having activity in their job was believed to help keep drivers strength up, and their weight down. If this activity was removed then risks were believed to result from being sedentary, and sitting down for long periods of time (for example one driver had developed a blood clot in his calf).

Seizing up and the possibility of spine/back hip and knee issues were mentioned as outcomes from inactivity:

"I suffer with a back problem but that was through a car accident and now and again I have to go and have physio on it because it flares up. When I've been sitting down for a long period of time that can make it a bit sore."

"You can imagine if you're sat there for four hours just on the motorway. Your knees, because you're not moving them are you? Your back will go. It's alright when you're young but as you get older it starts catching up with you."

Sitting for long periods of time waiting to unload the vehicles at delivery sites was reported to contribute to boredom, and to the likelihood of eating to pass the time; hence, contributing to drivers putting on weight.

Fluctuation in weight was something that was repeatedly mentioned by drivers and managers as being influenced by a lack of activity due to the nature of the job:

"There is no exercise now - you're perhaps in/out of the cab only four to five times a day. My weight does fluctuate a lot."

Differences in levels of activity were described as dependent on the type of shift; with day drivers being described as very active compared to night drivers:

"[For day drivers] the drive time between stops is between twenty and thirty minutes. They do may be ten deliveries a day and five or six collections. In contrast, night drivers are very sedentary - more like an office worker - will drive three and a half hours, do twenty minutes work and then drive three and a half hours back."

The organisation of deliveries was found to be company specific - along with the amount of activity that a driver was required to do when making a delivery.

3.5.3 Shift work

Managers reported that getting insufficient rest and sleep could have a negative impact on drivers' wellbeing, and that fatigue is something that can particularly affect night drivers:

"The typical time when a night worker starts to feel fatigued is somewhere between three and five o'clock in the morning. Consequently, probably eighty percent of night drivers would fall asleep in that time period. So we're always concerned with drivers getting enough rest."

There was a view amongst drivers that one of the main impacts of driving is tiredness; with drivers talking about working irregular shifts or working at night, and tiredness:

"[Getting more tired] is a problem for people that are driving at my age."

"After two am in the morning is when you're tired and your eyes are going. It's a horrible feeling. But everybody has it. This tiredness is normal for night workers, regardless of age, and they do suffer."

If the tiredness is bad drivers reported pulling in for half an hour, have a walk round and a cup of coffee, or have a sleep in the cab.

There was a perception by managers that older night drivers might be better than younger drivers at managing their sleep, because they have been doing it for years and get into a routine of making sure they get the right amount of sleep through the daytime:

"Older drivers know that they start at two am so by six, seven, eight o'clock they need to be going to bed. Whereas the younger driver might be out until eleven pm get home at twelve and think Oh I've got to be up at five thirty."

However, disturbed or shortened sleep during the daytime was reported to be an issue for night drivers in instances where daytime activities (such as building work, someone phoning up, and children playing) woke them up.

Drivers experienced tiredness slightly differently. One described doing an eight-week shift pattern with a five-day break, and how the two weeks running up to this five-day break are "horrible", as he is "tired all the time".

Tiredness was something that affected drivers' personal time when off work. By the end of a week at work, feelings included becoming a "zombie and being fit for nothing", and "taking three days to catch up on being tired if you have a week off".

3.5.4 Long hours and access to food

Drivers reported long hours as a big problem with the job, because the "industry looks to get as many hours out of drivers as they can". Managers also acknowledged that long hours are an issue.

The number of hours that drivers worked was a recurring theme across the interviews. Drivers mentioned that they could work as many as fifteen hours in a shift. Whilst they might know the start time of their shift each day, the finishing time was never certain. This was described as being due to delays on the road, as well as waiting times at delivery sites, which could contribute to tiredness and add a number of hours to a driver's shift (which was described as taking "as long as it takes").

An increase in the amount of traffic on the roads, along with road works and diversions were things that had an influence on the number of hours a driver might be on the road. If a driver was delayed in traffic, this might add hours to their shift, and was reported to contribute to feeling tired.

A driver described how thirty years ago, companies turned a blind eye to the number of hours a driver worked, and even today there are still ways of ignoring the maximum working hours:

“People put devices in the tachographs. So even when the wagon is moving it's registered in bed, so it looks like the driver is having a break.”

Long, and irregular hours, were believed to contribute to drivers gaining weight. For example drivers reported putting on weight if they were unable to get regular (or healthy) meals. There were recurring reports about how drivers have difficulty finding healthy food when at work. This was believed to contribute to drivers' weight gain and there being “a lot of fat wagon drivers”. They described how:

“To get something to eat, you can't just park the wagon anywhere - and you are also restricted on time - so it's virtually impossible to eat healthily.”

What they ate was described as “rubbish” and “junk”, food such as pies, chips, butties, chocolate and biscuits were mentioned. Reference was made to healthy food being more expensive than other options and not wanting to eat half the food at over-night stops.

There was an example of a driver who was now working in the depot, as this enabled him to have regular hours and meal times which was important for managing his diabetes. This driver attributed his diabetes to working long hours and getting few breaks, and he described how, in the past, he would work eight hours without having a meal.

An increased susceptibility to colds, especially during the winter, was believed to be an outcome from working long hours, as well as to getting wet getting in and out of the vehicle.

3.5.5 Welfare facilities

Drivers' opinions about the provision and the quality of welfare facilities differed, and were influenced by the locations drivers travelled to, the length of time they were driving between stops, the route they took, and the distance between motorway service stations. Those who mainly used the motorway networks did not generally believe welfare facilities to be a problem, unless they were stuck in traffic for two or three hours, or made longer journeys where there might not be enough facilities:

"Sometimes on longer journeys it can be quite a distance sometimes between some of the services; that impacts on you if you need to go to the toilet. You can be stuck in traffic for two or three hours, so you're just stuck with the situation."

Those who did shorter journeys did not find a problem if there was good provision at the destination. However for those who travelled cross country, gaining access to toilets could be difficult.

Managers did not believe access to welfare facilities was an issue, unless for example a driver was unwell with sickness and diarrhoea, or had irritable bowel syndrome. They believed that drivers used motorway service stations, delivery sites, and cafes.

Welfare facilities were described by drivers as being “no problem” at many destinations, for example at stores. However at some destinations, the toilets themselves were described as “not good” and there was an awareness that sometimes drivers do not want to use them but are not allowed access to an alternative.

There were also reports that welfare facilities can be a problem on the road. One reason for this was believed to be the decline in the number of public conveniences, which was thought to be a “societal problem rather than a function of the job”.

"Truck stops, even lay-bys all the toilets have gone now, that's why you see bottles of pee down the motorway. There's not many truck stops, you just can't get on them...it's always chocka [and] Councils have shut the toilets."

A way in which drivers managed access to toilets was to plan ahead, “think before taking the wheel” and to “go when you can, even if you don't need to”. If a driver was desperate, they would just go wherever they could.

Access to toilets is something that drivers indicated that they just put up with, and there was a comment about “needing the loo more” when getting older.

Impact on health

There was a widely held belief that welfare facilities had not had an impact on drivers’ health. However, whilst no one gave personal examples to suggest that of lack of welfare facilities had a negative impact on their health, there was a view that this could potentially result in health issues.

For example, access to welfare facilities was something that had necessitated a change of work from long to shorter journeys for one driver that had irritable bowel syndrome. Another driver identified kidney problems as a possible health outcome from not going to the toilet when needed.

There was a view that poor access to welfare facilities is “part of the reason they can't get HGV drivers”.

3.6 HOW PHYSICAL HEALTH AFFECTS WORK

There was a widely held view that drivers’ health does not affect their work. When asked how physical health might be impacting on work, interview participants spoke predominantly about how work is adapted to accommodate health issues. They also discussed how personal issues in domestic life may impact on both health and work. In addition, a manager cited company accident statistics and suggested that fatigue had contributed to fifty percent of these accidents; as it results in errors in judgement.

3.6.1 Adaptations to work

To ensure that health issues did not impact on work, there was a view that work was likely to have been adapted in some way. For example, in order to manage health issues, drivers reported moving to other tasks, or taking more breaks between driving to prevent them from seizing up or to deal with tiredness.

"If you drive on very long journeys... a four and a half hour journey there and a four and a half hour journey back, recognising that I'm no longer the spring chicken, I will stop and have a fifteen minute break and have a walk around and use the facilities, and that's fine, it's so I don't seize up. But, it's doing the sensible thing."

A driver reported how he had moved to shunting in the depot, as this enabled him to have regular meal breaks and manage his diabetes:

"On HGV work...meal breaks are all up and down, and sleep patterns are broken. It's not really a healthy job."

A recurring view from managers was that they had adapted work in order to accommodate a drivers health issues. Examples were given regarding how companies tried to adapt shift patterns to support drivers in coping with tiredness and to:

"Tailor work to the drivers, to give them a different way of doing the work from the younger guys, and keep them away from the heavier stuff."

"The fitter and healthier drivers tend to do more work - and pick up the work of those who are have ailments or injury (the less fit and healthy ones). Whilst this protects those who have got injury or illness, it puts work on other drivers who feel like they're getting the harder job because they're fit and healthy."

3.6.2 Personal and domestic life

Both managers and drivers spoke about the effect of personal (or domestic) life on work. For example a driver explained how he is currently unable to get enough sleep due to a neighbour's building work, so his hours had been changed to ensure he gets enough rest. Another spoke about the difficulties of having to balance work and caring for his father, and being very tired as a result.

Drivers also reported instances where they had adapted their personal lives to ensure that their work was not affected, for example by stopping playing sport, limiting their social life and going to bed early to address tiredness and fatigue.

3.7 MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS

When asked how work might affect drivers' mental health, interview participants spoke about the demands of the job, in terms of traffic; time pressures and pressure from management; long hours; and the behaviour of others. Other potential stressors that were discussed were witnessing road accidents and loneliness. Past working environments, and domestic circumstances were also reported to impact on mental health, and also on work.

3.7.1 Traffic

A recurrent view was that traffic congestion on the roads had increased, even at night:

"We've noticed over the last two years especially, you'd like to think that at night you can get around the country from A to B without all the congestion that we have through the daytime, but the number of night time motorway closures completely where you divert off the motorway, or indeed just lane closures, you know, from three lanes down to two, seems to be increasing more and more."

Getting caught in traffic was described as a potential "major stressor" for drivers, making their job more mentally demanding - potentially resulting in mental fatigue and headaches. Traffic was

generally described as “horrendous”, with a description of it making a driver “quiet and miserable” as he was in traffic all day, and consequently “stressed” all the time.

There were also reports of the trailers getting longer and spaces getting smaller, meaning that drivers had to think a bit more about manoeuvring, which was described as “a demand” in addition to the traffic.

3.7.2 Time (and management) pressures

The impact of traffic on drivers’ stress levels was talked about in conjunction with being under time pressures to be at a place by a certain time, and being “pushed” to do this by management:

"You can get stressed overall, with the driving job; it's the nature of the job. You can get so stressed at times. You could be stuck in traffic and you can have the boss on your back, like you need to be at such a place at such a time. It's like on this job, for instance, they do the Click and Collect... They've got to be in store for four o'clock. Well, if you've been stuck in traffic, or you've been held at...say if you've got two deliveries and you've been held up at the first one, you feel like the pressure is on you."

The potential impact of the pressures (of too much work and too little time) was summed up by a manager who described how:

"You get to the point where you feel like you are kind of disappearing, and you are sinking and you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel."

There were views that driving could be “absolutely exhausting” and “your head would be mashed”, “battered sometimes” if you were driving all the time. A driver described his son who did “twenty drops a day” and was constantly watched:

"He is off his head and he's only thirty-two. He's just rung me up and said Dad, I can't handle it anymore. I'm thinking of getting out of driving altogether. He's got to be all over the place, is under pressure. But that's the way transport is, pressure. The companies want more and more and more done in less time, and the roads are getting busier, and it's just stress, stress, stress, all the time."

A way in which pressure on drivers was reported to be mitigated was by management building in a margin of error when planning journeys:

"There's no pressure on drivers to get to...we plan...we build in a margin for error on our planning and most companies don't. One because we like to arrive on time, and we've got a great deal of pride in getting there on time, and two because if there are hold ups on the road we don't want to put pressure on the driver."

Drivers’ reported a change in their attitude towards pressure as they aged, and being less prepared to be “pushed” and put under pressure than when they were younger:

"I don't get stressed out now like I used to. That's down to me saying I ain't pushing myself anymore. When you're younger, you'll get pushed and pushed and pushed, and do more and more and more, and as the roads have got busier, it's got harder. But, I've got to a point

in my life where when they give me a run, it gets there when it gets there. I ain't going to kill myself or anybody else to get that load to that place."

Another driver reported how his experience helped to make the job "stress free" as he had been doing it for such a long time and knew it "inside out". In addition, he acknowledged that his management were very good in providing him with enough time to reach delivery sites. He felt that others were not so fortunate, and were under constant time pressures "because that's just the way jobs are run".

3.7.3 Long hours

Issues with traffic, and waiting times at delivery sites, were things that drivers cited as contributing to working long hours. Whilst there was a perception that traffic is something that "comes with the job", drivers were less accepting about the amount of time they can be kept waiting at delivery sites.

Being away from home for long hours was also reported to impact on stress levels. In addition, a number of things were reported to "play on drivers' minds". These included not knowing if they would get home (or whether they would be sleeping in the cab, due to delays or being sent on another job at short notice), and also missing out on key events in their children's lives.

Working long hours, four or five nights away from home a week, and lack of management understanding about reducing these, had led one driver to leave a job he enjoyed with a previous company where he had worked for ten years:

"The working hours that we're allowed to work is ridiculous...working for 15 hours dragging all around the country it was very, very, very stressful for me and my family. You need good companies to understand. The company I worked for didn't ...so I had to leave. I asked them to help me, they wouldn't so I left; it was with regret."

Managers were also mindful that long hours could impact on drivers' family relationships and contribute to stress levels. However, there were also comments from managers about mental health issues being "hard to diagnose" and that stress could be used as an "excuse" for being off work.

3.7.4 Behaviour of others

The behaviour and attitudes of other road users was something that was also believed to potentially contribute to stress. In the opinion of a manager, older drivers can cope with the behaviours and attitudes of other road users, and deal with this more calmly compared to younger drivers. Views from drivers confirmed that they do feel they have become calmer with age, and are therefore more likely to "just deal with" bad attitudes and let the behaviour of other road users "go", for example when encountering abuse or aggressive driving.

3.7.5 Loneliness

Whilst it was acknowledged that driving might sometimes be a lonely job, there was a recurrent view that drivers can enjoy having time on their own, and if they have been driving for many years, are used to their own company.

A factor that was believed to help with loneliness was technology that enabled drivers to keep in touch with others whilst they were away from home.

3.7.6 Domestic circumstances and past jobs

Domestic circumstances were cited by managers as a factor that could influence drivers' stress levels; with perceptions that younger drivers were more likely to have volatile domestic circumstances. There were descriptions of how stress from home life can impact on work. An example was given where a problem with experiencing stress at home was only identified, and dealt with by a company, when the driver drove into the back of another lorry. The driver had not said anything about it at work because "he was so keen to get to work, as it was the only sane place for him to be".

Suffering intermittently from post-traumatic stress disorder from previous roles in the armed forces, was something that was mentioned by both managers and drivers in different companies. A driver who has suffered from post-traumatic stress described how "little things" can make him nasty and angry, although he questioned if this was work-related or life-related.

A manager also recalled three or four employees with mental health issues, some of which he thought were due to them being "ex-forces".

3.7.7 Other stressors

Other factors that were mentioned as having a potential impact on mental health were witnessing road accidents and being involved in an accident at work. One driver discussed how he had witnessed a fatality, and how his boss at the time had given him a lot of abuse for stopping to help, and had threatened to sack him if he went to the inquest, as "all he was interested in was getting the job done". This driver attended the inquest regardless, and decided to leave this small company soon afterwards. Another driver described how he had a bad accident, and nearly lost his arm when a wagon overturned on him. He felt that it has taken him a long time to get over this, and whilst he used to enjoy driving and find it relaxing, he has not felt the same about driving wagons since.

3.8 EFFECT THAT WORK MAY HAVE ON FUTURE HEALTH

Managers believed that the extent to which the job may affect future health will be specific to the individual. There was a perception that slowing down or stopping work contributes to getting old. However, there was also a view that over time the job will wear drivers down, that they will age and the "stress will get to them".

Aspects of the job that were thought to enable drivers to work for longer were removing the physical tasks and managing working hours in order to address fatigue:

"We have a forty-eight hour [a week] contract in logistics [unlike others where it is sixty-five hours]. Drivers work on a flexible matrix and if they run over them we give them days off."

However, removing physical aspects of the job, whilst reducing risk of injury, were seen as a negative thing from a health point of view, as it increases time spent being sedentary.

The effect of work on future health was felt to be a concern for drivers who are not as fit as others and a manager could "see some drivers asking themselves whether their health will hold out to be able to do the job".

Drivers differed in their opinions about whether continuing to work might affect their health in the future. In cases where older drivers planned to retire within a few years (which was seen as an opportunity to start looking after themselves better), there was an implication that any future effect of work on health was not an issue. However, if drivers continued to work, there was also a perception that this would have a negative impact on their health such as having a heart attack or stroke, increased tiredness and joint / back problems; as haulage was perceived to "not be the healthiest job":

"If the job stays as it is now, and I stay as healthy as I feel now, I should be okay. But you don't know what's round the corner, do you? My back could get worse, I could get injured."

"I'm tired now, so I can just see it being more tired, but I don't think it's affecting my health, it affects my home life a bit, 'cause I go to bed about half past eight, and everyone else is still up."

"The main [health risk] for wagon drivers is heart attacks or strokes, isn't it. You think about it sometimes; could it happen to me? It could, it could happen to anyone."

Looking after themselves and watching out for possible signs of ill health was seen as important, as was having the option to adapt how manual tasks are done:

"When I'm sixty-five? Well, I won't be pulling cages, I'll definitely dig my feet in there. I'm not pulling 500kg cages off. I don't think I'll have the strength then. But we'll just use electric trucks."

Continuing to do manual work in the future was anticipated to have negative impacts on joints, meaning that drivers may need to stop doing manual work in the future. There was a perception that "ninety-nine per cent of drivers here have problems with the shoulder or with the back", and that in the future they would still be able to do the job, but with more difficulty.

The level of physical activity in a drivers' role was believed to be something that might affect their health in the future:

"As a driver you're never pushing yourself. You're not doing anything physically, and you're just putting layers and layers and layers of fat on you all the time. 'Cause half the time you're eating rubbish, chocolate bars, biscuits, because there's no access to healthy food. And you can't do any activity anyway."

Continuing to work in a role that enabled them to manage their health was seen as important, for example one that involved having regular mealtimes in order to control diabetes and flexibility in working patterns.

There were views about the mental health impact of continuing to work. For example driving was anticipated to become more mentally tiring with age.

3.9 CONCERNS ABOUT RETIREMENT

Drivers spoke about their plans for retirement, money, their mortgages, and pensions. Retirement plans ranged from continuing to work as long as they were still fit to do so, to wanting to retire completely at a specific age:

"If I feel the way I do now I wouldn't be retiring when I have to. You don't have to really retire here....If I feel as fit and as healthy as I do...I'm not saying I'll be a hundred per cent, but I'd still like to carry on with it, to be honest... I'd be quite happy to keep working as long as I was fit and healthy to do stuff."

Continuing to work was envisaged to be in the same job, and also in different jobs; perhaps driving smaller vehicles and working fewer hours.

Whilst there were generally no concerns about retiring, there were instances where having sufficient money was a major consideration for drivers. However, there were also instances where drivers believed they had earned enough money in the past, and were no longer "chasing it" as they once did. Their mortgages were paid, or would be within a few years, and they had pension provisions. However, there was still a desire to continue to work in order to remain active and avoid boredom, even if finances meant they could retire.

There were also instances where mortgages still had to be paid, and where pension provision was felt to be insufficient. This contributed to fears about reducing hours and losing money:

"To just work a 30 hour week, three days, I'm frightened of doing it. I'm afraid of losing that money, because of the fact that you're a long time retired. Hopefully a long time...doesn't always happen, but you know. You're a long time sat aren't you? Frightening. If I do what my mum did, I'll be dead in ten years."

There was a desire to want to be in a position where they did not have to worry about money, combined with an acknowledgement that they did not know what would happen once when they did retire. There was also an isolated view that thinking should be focused on today, not on retirement, expressed as "I never think what will happen or what I will do".

Managers' perceptions about drivers' retirement concerns closely mirrored those of the drivers themselves, reflecting the belief that every driver views retirement differently. There were companies in which older drivers were believed to be looking forward to retirement, financially secure and able to retire tomorrow if they wished. There were also managers who appreciated that drivers may want to continue earning money, or may need to continue working to make ends meet:

"Some of our drivers are in their seventies. Some don't see why they would want to retire while they can still earn money."

"Drivers were saying they were planning to retire, but now they're thinking about going on a little bit further, because of government and changes. They work to make ends meet (everyone would like to retire at sixty-five, seventy). Some drivers are a lot older seventy-two, seventy-four. They plod along, they come in, part-time work...they fill the gap, but I think if life was different for them, prior to them reaching that age, they wouldn't have

worked it. They wouldn't be working now. It's just they've got to make ends meet, you know. Their pensions or their retirement programme or planning didn't meet their needs. So they just keep on going until they basically stop."

Those companies that wished to accommodate personal choices offered flexible and part-time working. There was an appreciation that if being away from family is all drivers have known, there may be "major social consequences if they stop working" (although these were not specified).

3.10 IMPROVING HEALTH

When asked what their employer could do to improve their health, drivers talked about health checks; better food facilities and options; maintaining equipment and manual handling; changing work and working hours and physical activity (the gym, sport and walking).

Whilst health checks were reported to be offered to drivers by their companies, there was a recurrent view that these were not taken up, as drivers might already be having hospital checks, have a statutory check scheduled, or "don't want to tell people all about themselves". However, company occupational health provision had been used by a driver to address his back problem.

Access to, and having facilities for getting, proper hot food was repeatedly mentioned by drivers as something that would improve their health. Facilities might be a fridge and microwave in the vehicle, subsidies for healthy food and better hot food options in twenty-four hours services at night. Managers also spoke about the difficulty that drivers experienced in obtaining healthy food; one company had already provided healthy packed lunches for their drivers and another had considered offering this.

Broken wheels on cages and issues with pallets were mentioned as a risk to drivers' health, and a "simple thing" that drivers' believed companies could "fix". When a cage with two wheels had fallen on a driver he described how it had knocked him out of the trailer, resulting in a broken shoulder and tendon damage. Provision of company training on "picking things up and moving them" was believed to be a good thing.

Drivers felt that companies could help them by providing different (non-driving) work for a period of time when they might be having health issues, and by reducing their working hours:

"This is going to be controversial, reduce my hours, so I could spend more time at home, and be at home for longer. Which they're not going to help, 'cause they're going to make my hours longer, from forty hours to forty-five hours. So, I suppose, as I'm getting older, I want to be at home more."

They also thought that companies could be "a bit more understanding" when drivers are tired:

"I am tired, I'm very tired, I'm very tired now. Yesterday I had four hours sleep. Four hours sleep last night...It's tiring and I'm fifty-three, I'm getting no younger. It's how long that I'm going to carry on doing this for or will it kill me."

Managers were also mindful of supporting drivers when they were tired, and helping them to get sufficient sleep and rest. One manager described how if a night driver could not make it back in his ten hour shift, or ten hour drive time (e.g. due to road closures, diversions and delays), the company

will park his vehicle and someone will bring him back by car, and somebody else collects the truck. The same manager described how this can still add a few hours to the day which “puts pressure on the driver in terms of getting his daily rest and sleep throughout the day”. If this happened, the company would tell the driver to come in later for his next shift (and put him on a shorter distance) or in the most severe cases would ask the driver to “take the night off”, as they are very conscious that time away from work is important. In terms of managing fatigue, another manager described being extremely supportive of drivers that need to stop and take a break for a power nap, as well as supporting drivers by calling the drop location and telling them that the driver will be late.

The option of having flexible working was mentioned by managers, as being good for both the driver and the company:

“It [a three day week] keeps experienced people in a job in an environment where it’s very difficult to recruit good drivers, and it also keeps them fresh.”

“[We] have never done zero-hours contracts as don't believe in it, but if drivers want to tell us when they are available to work then that's fine.”

A manager described how until recently the company was resistant to being flexible and allowing people to make a partial move towards retirement. He felt that a lot of companies did not like to offer flexible working as they don’t see it as a priority, and “think it’s easier to keep drivers on a five day contract”.

3.10.1 Activities

Whilst many companies offered access to gym facilities, drivers reported that they did not use them, because “it’s boring”, they prefer outdoor sports, they have not got time, or are too tired at the end of a long day and just want to “go home and crawl into bed”. Whilst team sports were reported to be of interest to drivers, the different start and finish times were a barrier to them getting together to participate.

Managers were also aware that it is difficult for drivers to be more active, and cited long hours, lack of time and tiredness as barriers:

"Because you are concentrating between eight and twelve hours a day, when you get home you are physically drained, want a shower, have your tea and go to bed."

Walking was mentioned as a way of de-stressing after a day at work. However walking was perceived to be problematic for drivers during the working day (in the downtime waiting between deliveries) as “you can’t just walk around anywhere due to forklifts”, and because drivers “need to stay with the vehicle in case there are any issues”.

Using the waiting times at sites to do some activity was something that managers also believed was difficult. This was because drivers might be in the middle of an industrial estate where there is nothing they can do; because of site rules and sites not wanting drivers “walking round the yard”.

"I’m sure there must be some things we could do [during the waiting times]. I think it’s actually having an idea around what we might be able to do with them. It’s so difficult, a lot

of these industrial sites where they find themselves waiting aren't really conducive to taking exercise. And the food that's available at these locations is crap."

There was a suggestion from managers that companies could provide "a toolkit" with sheets for in-cab exercises, a bit like "long-haul flight exercises", as:

"Some of the guys haven't done exercise for a very long time and they probably don't really know what to do".

In addition, it was suggested that companies could provide information on cardiovascular health and weight issues. They could put up posters with information about "what to do on a break to get your heart rate up" and a chart that shows "one burger equals so many calories which then equals one apple, one banana etc." It was also suggested that providing a healthy lunch pack one day a week was also something that a company could do, to show drivers what this looks like.

Another suggestion from managers was that a company could provide a recreational area, with a table tennis and pool table; somewhere drivers could take fifteen to twenty minutes at the end of the day before going home. However, it was acknowledged that it isn't a normal working environment, as drivers do not all finish at the same time.

Drivers questioned "why the company should help" and noted that "drivers have responsibility for their own actions". There was a recurrent view that there are no activities that companies could provide that drivers would want to participate in. This was due to the barriers reported above, and their lives outside of work being full; with family, hobbies and activities such as golf and cycling. However, it was suggested that companies might get drivers involved by providing competitions and having things like weight loss charts.

3.11 MONITORING HEALTH

The predominant way in which drivers perceived that their health was being monitored was via medicals; legally required to maintain their licence (every five years between the age of forty-five and sixty, and every year after this). There was a belief that these medicals should be more often (and might be offered to everyone regardless of age), and that as long as drivers pass the medical, this is good enough for the company. Managers spoke about monitoring the results from driver medicals. In addition, they may require drivers to notify them about any medication that they are taking, may monitor manual handling and provide performance reviews for drivers who are off work with medical problems. There were instances of extra monitoring for night shift workers, including health surveys, surveillance and medicals, and CCTV observation of drivers whilst they are driving, to help pick up any issues with fatigue and stress.

Drivers reported going to their managers to discuss health problems, and that they might also be asked how they are on an ad hoc basis; and especially if they were looking "horrid" or "tired". A manager may also tell them if they are "getting fat", refer them to occupational health, and carry out regular, random, drugs and alcohol tests.

There was evidence of companies identifying issues with drivers' health in similar ways, although the primary way this was done differed. An observation from a manager was that the driver assessor or trainer is often the first to notice a driver is suffering with a mobility problem or with stress; and that

more referrals to occupational health are prompted by the company, than by the driver coming to them and saying they have a problem. However there was another view that in eighty per cent of cases, the driver will come forwards and speak to a manager about any problems they are having.

A “know your numbers clinic” was used by one company to identify health issues. This involved the occupational health provider determining blood pressure, cholesterol and body mass index to arrive at a “health age” for drivers. This health age was compared with drivers’ chronological age and they were given a report to raise their awareness of health issues. There were instances of a driver aged fifty who had a health age of about twenty eight, and other younger staff who had a health age greater than their chronological age. The take up for these clinics was believed to be good, with drivers queuing up to come in.

Another way that drivers’ health needs were identified was via a survey that asked what they wanted from a health and wellbeing programme. Findings from the survey indicated that drivers’ first preference was activities and information to promote good mental health. Others main preferences were ability to do exercise during the day and eye tests.

Managers reported obtaining advice about health and wellbeing from occupational health practitioners; counselling services; company health and safety representatives and the Human Resources department. In addition, they might do some research on the internet.

3.12 INTERVENTIONS TO IMPROVE DRIVERS’ HEALTH

There were instances where a company would support drivers to get sufficient rest and sleep, offer healthy food, flexible working and health promotion and awareness raising initiatives; albeit the level of support differed across companies. Support with handling curtains in high wind, a sleep apnoea project, a programme to minimise stress, and listening groups for drivers were also mentioned by managers. In instances where companies had interventions to monitor health and raise awareness of health issues there was a view that it could be a challenge to get drivers to engage with any interventions that are designed to follow up on these. This was suggested to be due to scepticism, ignorance about the issues, or because drivers are just “a bit scared” of getting involved.

3.13 PERSPECTIVES ON JOINING AND LEAVING THE INDUSTRY

Drivers and managers would generally either encourage both young and older workers to join the industry, or discourage both. In instances where a driver would encourage a young person but discourage an older person, they believed that the job can get harder as you get older if it involves physical work, and that older HGV drivers would not want to experience the poor behaviour of other road users (such as abuse and aggressive behaviour). In addition to being encouraged because of positive aspects of the job, older drivers would be encouraged if they were enthusiastic, enjoyed driving or intended to do the job for a while.

3.13.1 Joining the industry

Managers perceived that whilst younger drivers are able to grow into the job, an older driver may find it difficult to get into the job, hard to enjoy and stressful. Experience was also believed to be important for an older driver:

"The way you can get through driving from fifty or sixty to retirement age is due to everything you have learned in your younger days. If you are going in fresh at fifty years old with no experience, no knowledge, I think that would be very hard. If you are a fifty year old and have a bit of a bad back or your knees are hurting and your eyes are not what they used to be, to go into driving a class one vehicle that is brand new, I think it would be potentially dangerous, both physically and mentally demanding."

When considering if they would encourage people to join the industry and work as a HGV driver, both drivers and managers discussed positive and negative aspects of the job. One reason why drivers viewed their work as either positive or negative was how it was organised and managed by the company (e.g. hours worked; money and benefits; distances travelled, and tasks undertaken).

Wider changes in the industry were also discussed. For example, observations were made about the ageing workforce, the potential shortage of drivers in the future, and the need for the industry to do more to encourage young people into it. Comments were also made about what the industry was like compared to the past, as well as what it might look like in the future.

"I would have, (encouraged people to join), years ago because it was a good job. It's not a good job anymore. It's not anywhere near what it used to be like. It's more stressful. There's more fatigue and more tiredness."

"Transport has gone off the edge of a cliff to what it used to be. There's no fun in it anymore, there's no enjoyment. It's all about making profit for the company. Running you into the ground."

A recurrent view was that a HGV driver will always have work. However,

"If a lad aged twenty to twenty-one does join, in twenty years-time HGVs may be replaced by lots of electric white vans - the job will change - so there's lots of uncertainty."

Driving a HGV was believed to be a dangerous job where you need to have "your wits about you". A HGV was described as "a lethal weapon" and "forty four tonnes that can make a hell of a mess in the wrong hands."

An advantage of being a HGV driver was believed to be that you have your own space, are sat up high with a good view, and are your own boss.

"You're your own boss. Once you're out of the gate, you know you have to be at a certain place within a certain time, but you're on your own. It's just freedom. It's just so good being out there."

The increasing volume of traffic on the roads, and the poor behaviour of some other road users (who were described as "idiots", "abusive", and "horrendous drivers") were mentioned as negative aspects of the job. In addition, road works and diversions were problematic in adding to the time drivers spent on the road (with one driver experiencing eight diversions in a night, and diversions where high sided vehicles would not fit, resulting in extending his shift by two hours). These were aspect of the job that were perceived to be stressful.

Working long, unsociable hours was a recurrent reason that drivers and managers gave for not encouraging people to join the industry. Doing distance work was not something to be encouraged because it was believed to take a special kind of person to do it because of the different start times that can have a negative impact on sleep patterns. However, experiencing the adventure of nights away from home was believed to appeal to younger drivers. Long unsociable hours were believed to have a negative impact on family life, particularly not seeing one's children growing up, and to impact on social life in general:

"you can have different start times in the same week, you can do an eight hour shift, you can do a twelve hour shift, you can do a fifteen hour shift and you very rarely know until the day you turn up what that shift is going to be. You might find out in the evening of the night before. So organising a social life for a youngster around working in a lorry is very, very difficult, they don't like it."

In contrast, another view that was expressed was that being at work and away from family can perhaps also be positive for those who are older and do fewer hours, as it means they are not always in the house.

The money earned from driving was perceived to be worse than in the past and a reason for discouraging people from joining the industry. Driving was believed to deserve a more professional wage:

"Remuneration needs to be better and reflect the responsibility of driving a £85,000 vehicle with a £100,000 or £500,000 load."

The amount of financial commitment required to qualify as a professional Class 1 driver was also cited as a potential barrier to joining the industry.

3.13.2 Leaving the industry

Many negative aspects of the job, that were cited as reasons for discouraging people to enter the industry, were also believed to be factors that contributed to older drivers leaving the industry. The exception was the physical demands of the job, which were believed to be a reason for drivers of any age leaving the industry, if they exceeded ability to cope with them.

A reason why older drivers might leave before retirement was believed to be because they have had enough and do not enjoy the work anymore. It was suggested that this might be due to more rules and regulations, stress from increased traffic and road works or to the length of the shifts and the part of the week that the shifts occupied. Many older drivers were believed to leave the industry because of the long unsociable hours and being unable to do a twelve to fourteen hour day. Another reason was suggested to be because they don't want to go back into a classroom and do the driver certificate of competence (thirty five hours every five years). In these cases, they may decide not to renew their licence and leave the industry when it expires.

There was a perception that rather than retiring, drivers may leave to go into different work; (something physically easier or less stressful) especially if they have seen others doing the same work have a heart attack from being constantly stressed at work, and they do not want this to

happen to them. However, if a driver has good working conditions and good pay, managers perceived that they may want to remain driving forever.

In addition to the above, drivers believed drivers might retire due to fatigue and being tired, because they wanted to enjoy more time with family, and possibly due to injuries and health issues (such as knee and back problems), as well as changes in the industry (such as technology and too much paperwork). They would become disillusioned and fed up with the hours, the traffic, being under time pressure and being chased about where they were all the time.

A recurrent view amongst the drivers was that the attitudes of others towards them, and feeling undervalued, may prompt them to leave the industry:

“No one wants you. People at the destinations make me feel like a nuisance when I turn up with a load. If you argue with them, they make you wait - can be two hours.”

"You do tend to be looked upon as though you're part of the wagon, in that...oh the wagon's working, you should be, you know. Put you in a corner and plug you in and charge you up until tomorrow."

The poor pay and conditions, particularly lack of sick pay were key issues contributing to drivers feeling undervalued. There was a perception that companies can want “drivers to be everything professional, but pay them peanuts”.

3.14 ATTITUDES

Drivers were asked if their experience of work had changed as they aged, and whether they felt treated any differently compared to when they were younger. Both drivers and managers were asked if there was any difference in how an older and a younger driver is treated at work now, and about how happy drivers were with their current working environment.

Areas that participants covered were: change in personal feelings towards the job; higher demands for younger drivers; more respect for older drivers; adjustments for older drivers; treatment of drivers now compared to in the past; differences in customer behaviour; and attitudes about the working environment (access to and at sites; long hours; vehicles; waiting to offload; hot food on motorways; support from managers and pay).

3.14.1 Change in the way work is experienced

A recurring view was that drivers had experienced a change in personal feelings towards the job. This was expressed as not wanting to work as much as they had in the past (being under less financial pressure to earn money), having less enthusiasm for work, and the job having less appeal than it once did. A general view was that drivers had “slowed down” and no longer “rushed around” as they once did.

“[As you get older] before you actually do something, you will stop and think, right okay, what I need to do is this. This is what I need to achieve, how am I going to achieve it? You risk assess everything before you jump in, whereas if you've not got that maturity, you just jump in and then suffer the consequences after that.”

A slowing down in reactions was something that was often mentioned by drivers. Slowing down was also articulated as being more laid back, relaxed, mellowing, not working as many hours, and coping better with stress and frustration. A driver described how:

“With age you become a philosopher...you don’t have the time to fight or shout, because life is too short, you need to enjoy it.”

Managers also agreed that enthusiasm for the work may decline, and that someone who had been driving for a long time might come to dislike it. It was reported that managers has heard older drivers’ say “I absolutely detest driving, but it is the only thing I can do, and the only thing I am good at”.

3.14.2 Attitudes towards older workers

There was a recurrent view amongst drivers that their respective companies treated everyone the same, regardless of their age. However, there was a belief amongst drivers and managers that due to their experience, older drivers obtained more respect than younger drivers, have their needs accommodated, and that more demands may be made of younger drivers.

Drivers expressed the following views:

“I think it’s the age thing, it’s like...I think sometimes ... oh he’s young, he’ll do it. You kind of get treated a little bit differently that way. As you get older, I think you kind of generate that little bit of respect off people.”

“I’ve done this for such a long time, maybe I get a bit of, oh well he knows what he’s doing sort of thing. So I’m not pushed to do things I don’t particularly want to do or need to do. People starting off in the industry are tested; pushed to see what they can do.”

In addition, managers explained that:

“The company doesn’t push the older boys to the limit like they would someone a lot younger. They give them that little bit of leeway. You know, we understand that these people are getting older, and where can we accommodate them? Where can we make things easier for them in their life? You know, they’ve been working all their life. We just want to show our gratitude back to them by saying, you know, okay, look, do this little job, it’s only a little one today, but they’ve looked after us in the past, all those years, twenty, thirty years at the company. We don’t still think they can do the stuff they did years ago.”

“We try to give a fair share of the hard and the easy work to everybody, but when there’s a driver that, for whatever reason - might be that he’s had an injury or an operation perhaps - we will find him easy loads to do (e.g. a one trip, one drop where he just sits behind the wheel of a lorry) and we may organise for somebody at the other end to give him a hand to undo his curtains and his straps.”

Differences that drivers perceived now, compared to when they were younger included having less job security. This was described in terms of having less power than in the past when companies wanted to employ them, whereas now companies were more likely to ask them to leave. In addition, there was a feeling that drivers are getting “more like a number”, with a proposed increase

in hours from forty to forty-five at one company anticipated to have negative consequences for drivers' health:

"We're going more and more like a number. They want us on forty-five hours, because we're on forty at the moment. See how knackered...we're all coming in with zimmer frames and bad backs".

Whilst a driver believed he was more likely to get treated as a person now, another felt that "no one cares" about drivers, and described how he is told to wait (four hours in one instance) with no regard for how many hours he may have already done.

There was an acceptance that whilst companies made adjustments for drivers they can not be expected to bend over backwards for them:

"I suppose you get to a point where...if you can't do the job, you've got to sort of surrender, haven't you, and go and do something...you can't expect them to bend over totally backwards for you."

Managers noted that customers can treat drivers differently depending on their perceptions of age and experience. For example customers "can be quite bolshie with a young guy. But not with the more mature driver". In addition, road users may make a judgement that an older driver is unsafe or too slow, and a young driver is too small or not able to handle a HGV (which may cause issues with how other road users drive around HGVs).

3.14.3 Attitudes about the work environment

Whilst drivers believed their working environment could be improved, they reported being generally happy with it; enjoying working for a good supportive company, and having comfortable vehicles to work with. This was in contrast to drivers' negative perceptions of the job (e.g. Section 3.13.2).

One way to increase drivers' happiness with the job was believed to be by improving the pay, although there appeared to be an acceptance about the pay situation:

"Eighty per cent (happy). I think the other twenty per cent is because I'm getting old. I don't work any harder than I have to, for what they pay me."

"Vehicles are spot on the job here is good. If they'd just pay us properly. But it is what it is."

Managers were also conscious that drivers were dissatisfied with the pay and benefits, and believed that they should be happy with the vehicles, as they are "new and nice".

In addition to accepting the pay, drivers also seemed to accept they would continue to work as a driver:

"A lot of fellows do driving because there's not a lot else they're going to be able to do."

"Sometimes think to myself, I wish I'd never come in to the haulage side of things, but it's what I've done for so long."

Whilst drivers believed that addressing the long working hours, and waiting hours to offload, would help their health and happiness with the work, there was doubt that the hours would ever change:

“Aspects of health could be improved. You still see fifteen-hour days, sixty-hour weeks, that aspect of the industry could be improved but I don't think it's ever going to change because that's business, that's the industry.”

Improving access to sites was mentioned by drivers in two ways. Firstly in terms of having space to turn the truck at delivery sites, and avoiding the need for a crane to lift the trailer out, because it's got stuck. Secondly, getting access to motorways, as more and more units are being built around junctions, and access is getting worse.

Managers commented on the support that was provided to drivers in terms of not putting time pressures on them, and offering an outlet for drivers to get things off their chests at the end of the day:

“The key thing is not having anyone to speak to - they need to get things off their chests - so people in the office tend to 'get it' at the end of the day.”

In addition, providing flexibility with the contract to allow reduced hours if desired was believed to improve drivers' satisfaction with the job:

“I think the facility to be flexible with the contract is a big one for us. In the past if drivers wanted to go down to a few days a week, they had to become an agency driver - but it was a shame to lose them as employees - so now they can do a few days and stay as an employee.”

Another factor that drivers believed would improve their working lives was better food on motorways (see Section 3.5.4).

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study provides evidence that both the physical and mental aspects of work can become harder as HGV drivers work into older age; although due to their experience, older drivers can become better at coping with the mental demands of work.

Whilst there are a number of aspects of work that can negatively affect the health of older HGV drivers, the main one is the long, irregular and unsociable hours that invariably come with the job. This appears to have an impact on both physical and mental health. This pattern of work can result in tiredness and fatigue, make it difficult for drivers to access healthy food, and provide little opportunity for physical activity or a social life outside of work. Any health impact of these hours is likely to be exacerbated by working under constant time pressures.

The design of HGV drivers' work (in instances where this is not properly managed) is likely to result in increased stress, and could potentially lower productivity and increase accidents. Whilst the immediate working environment within the cab of a modern HGV is likely to be good, the wider external working environment raises concerns for health (with increased volumes of traffic, delays on the road, long waiting times at delivery sites, negative attitudes and abuse from others and possible issues with welfare facilities).

The findings indicate how automation of vehicles can be perceived to take away an element of control over work. In addition, drivers may have little or no control, over the hours that they work, the shifts that they do and the vehicles they drive (although this is dependent on which company they work for and the level of support and understanding from managers). If the job contains these features (high demands, low control, lack of support; conflict; and imposition of change) then this is likely to put drivers at greater risk of ill health as they work into older age (or to exacerbate any existing health conditions). Indeed, drivers anticipated that future negative consequences of continuing to work in the same job might be heart attack or stroke, continuing to gain weight, increased tiredness and musculoskeletal issues.

Drivers may accept that the demands of work are just part of the job, and therefore any issues with it impacting on their health may not be articulated to employers. In addition, they may not connect their health with, or attribute it to, work activities; which might be indicative of an underreporting of ill health in this older cohort of workers.

Older drivers may continue working into older age if their employer values their skills and experience, is understanding and offers them flexibility. They may continue to work if this is all they have ever known, if they are fearful of losing income, or feel that they do not want to spend more time at home. However, if employers are not understanding of the needs of older drivers, then work is likely to have a negative impact on both their mental and physical health, thus potentially increasing the prevalence of ill health and disability at work.

Any interventions to address health risks in this cohort of workers will need to look beyond the individual to the wider social and cultural environment within which HGV drivers work, and will work in the future.

4.1 LIMITATIONS

The value of qualitative research is that it enables exploration of individual experiences that would otherwise be lost in the averaging and statistical manipulation of data. The nature of this research means that sample sizes were intentionally small.

In line with the ethical approval obtained for this work, participation was voluntary. It is acknowledged that companies who consented to participate are likely to be those with good health and safety practices. In addition, those drivers who consented to participate were, to some extent, likely to have been selected by the companies. However, drivers were given assurances of confidentiality and anonymity and spoke openly about their current work experiences as well as their previous employment with other logistics companies.

Despite the limitations, the resulting data provides a range of views and rich information on extending working lives and health from all participants. In addition, the findings resonate with those from other countries in terms of experiences, and health implications, of the working environment.

The findings are not intended to be representative of the wider working population or to be generalizable beyond the setting in which they are obtained. Having said this, a range of views was captured, which could be applicable to the parent population (i.e. HGV drivers), and to other settings in which similar conditions exist. They can also contribute to generation of ideas and theories regarding extending working lives and health.

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6 APPENDIX 1 QUESTION SETS

Questions for Drivers

We are interested in your views on age and health at work.

Please could you confirm that you have read the information sheet, and are still happy to take part and to sign the consent form (and to be audio recorded to ensure we accurately capture your views)?

You do not have to answer all of the questions, and you can stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. There will be no problems for you if you choose to do this. (Details of specific employee assistance programme to be provided if required).

1. Background and levels of activity

1.1 Where do you work?

Prompt: Size of company? Employment contract?

1.2 What does your job involve?

1.3 What type of vehicle do you drive for work?

1.4 How many years have you worked in your current job?

1.5 How many years have you been working as a driver?

1.6 Roughly how much of your working day would you say is spent sitting down (i.e. not physically active)?

1.7 How old are you?

2. Health

2.1 What changes have you seen in your health throughout your work life?

Prompt: Mental and physical health

2.2 To what extent do you think any changes in your health are due to your work as a driver?

2.3 What effect do you think your work is having on your health?

Prompt: Which aspects of your work have the most impact? E.g. Sitting; attention to multiple information in the cab; witnessing road incidents / accidents etc.....

Prompt: Consider both physical and mental health

Prompt: Do you have adequate access to, or any concerns about your access to welfare facilities?

2.4 How do you think work may affect your health in the future?

2.5 How does your health affect the work that you do?

2.6 Do you have any concerns about retirement?

Prompt: Does your employer offer you any advice or support about retirement, pensions etc?

3. Age

3.1 Has your experience of work changed as you get older?

3.2 Has the way work affects your health changed as you get older?

Prompt: Please consider both physical and mental health

4. Interventions: Managing health

4.1 What could your employer do to help you improve your health?

4.2 What activities could they provide in your workplace?

4.3 Is there any activity that you would join in with whilst at work? (e.g. table tennis / walking football etc).

4.4 How does your work monitor your health?

Questions 5 and 6 to be covered if time permits

5. Joining and Leaving work

5.1 Would you encourage young people to join the industry and do the work you do?

5.2 Would you encourage friends your own age to do the work you do?

5.3 Why do you think drivers (aged 50 or over) leave the job?

6. Attitudes

6.1 Would you say you are treated any differently at work compared to when you were younger?

Prompt: If yes, in what way.

6.2 Would you say that you are treated any differently at work compared to workers of other ages doing the same job as you?

Prompt: If yes, why do you think this might be?

6.3 Are you happy with your work environment? (e.g. things about the vehicle you drive, the sites you go to)

Prompt: Technology changes, training provided.

Thank you for taking part in this study

Questions for Managers

We are interested in your views on age and health at work.

Please could you confirm that you have read the information sheet, and are still happy to take part and to sign the consent form (and to be audio recorded to ensure we accurately capture your views)?

You do not have to answer all of the questions, and you can stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. There will be no problems for you if you choose to do this.

(Details of specific employee assistance programme to be provided if required).

1. Background questions:

1.1 How long have you been working in the transport sector?

Prompt: As a manager / supervisor?

Prompt: What type of driving roles do you oversee (e.g. type of vehicle)?

1.2 How many staff do you manage / supervise? What age range?

1.3 How old are you?

1.4 Have you ever worked as a driver?

2. Health and wellbeing of drivers

2.1 What changes to driver's health have you noticed throughout their working life?

Prompt: Mental and physical health

Prompt: What changes in their health do you notice (if any) as drivers continue to work beyond the age of 50?

2.2 To what extent do you attribute any changes in their health to working as a driver?

2.3 What effect do you think work has on driver's health?

Prompt: Which aspects of work have the most impact? E.g. Sitting; attention to multiple information in the cab; witnessing road incidents / accidents, welfare facilities etc.....

Prompt: Consider both physical and mental health

Prompt: Do drivers have concerns about adequate access to welfare facilities?

2.4 If older drivers (50+) continue to work as drivers, how do you think this might affect their health in the future?

2.5 To what extent do you think driver's health affects their work?

2.6 Do your employees have concerns about retirement?

Prompt: Do you offer advice or support about retirement, pensions etc?

3. Age

3.1 How do you think a driver's experience of work changes as they get older?

3.2 To what extent do you think the health impacts of work change as drivers get older?

Prompt: Please consider both physical and mental health

4. Interventions: Assessing and managing health and wellbeing

4.1 How do you identify if there is an issue with a drivers health?

Prompt: Physical health. Mental health.

4.2 What do you do to address any issues (to help improve driver health and wellbeing)?

Prompt: Do you provide any activities in the workplace?

Prompt: Do you use any 'interventions'? What works well (which interventions make a difference)? What has not worked so well?

4.3 How do you monitor older drivers' health?

Prompt: How do you make sure they have their medicals? Do you monitor this?

4.4 Are there any activities (for improving driver's health) that the company could provide in your workplace that you think drivers would join in with whilst at work?

4.5 Who or where do you go to for advice about drivers health and wellbeing?

Prompt: Who do you view as a 'trusted' expert?

Questions 5 and 6 to be covered if time permits

5. Joining and leaving work

5.1 Would you encourage young people to join the industry and work as a driver?

5.2 Would you encourage older individuals (age 50+) to join the industry and work as a driver?

5.3 In your opinion why do drivers (aged 50 or over?) leave the job?

6. Attitudes

6.1 Would you say older drivers are treated differently to those who are younger?

Prompt: By yourself or by other employers?

Prompt: How might they be treated differently? Why do you think this might happen?

6.2 To what extent do you think drivers are happy with their work environment?

Prompt: The vehicles; the sites; technology changes, training provided.

6.3 What changes has the company made over the years?

Prompt: Key changes to vehicles? Key changes to sites?

6.4 Do you consult drivers before you make these changes?

Thank you for participating in this study

Occupational health and extended working lives in the transport sector

The average age of the working population in the UK is increasing, and people are now more likely to work to an older age. Increasing the number of years spent at work, extending working lives, is something that is evident across many sectors. However, evidence about the implications of working into older age is relatively scarce, and there are gaps in knowledge and understanding regarding the potential health and safety impacts.

The purpose of this study was to gather evidence about the health effects of working into older age, by focusing on the transport and logistics sector. Interviews were carried out with professional drivers of heavy goods vehicles (HGV) aged over fifty, and those who manage or supervise them.

A recurrent finding was that the work of a professional HGV driver in the UK is likely to involve long, unsociable hours, high physical and mental demands, and often long periods of sedentary work. The adverse health consequences of these factors were reported to be musculoskeletal disorders, stress, tiredness and fatigue, and issues associated with being overweight. However, having an appropriate amount of physical work was believed to be beneficial in helping drivers to remain fit and strong, and to keep their weight down, as they continued to work into older age.

This study provides valuable insights into the health impact of the changing world of work, as individuals work into older age. Reports from study participants highlight the importance of appropriate management of working hours and physical tasks for older workers. They also indicate that any employer interventions to support older workers may need to look beyond these individual factors and consider how the wider social and cultural aspects of work might also be adapted.

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