

**Summary:**

## **Sense or sensibility?**

### **A study of fear and perceived risk among professional drivers in Norway and France**

*TØI Report 1177/2011*

*Author(s): Aslak Fyhri and Tor-Olav Nævestad  
Oslo 2011, 21 pages Norwegian language*

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*Bus drivers feel more afraid at work than other drivers. This the main conclusion from a survey among drivers in taxi, lorry, metro and bus. In the study we looked at risk for both accidents and unpleasant incidents such as violence and threats. There is a strong relationship between what the drivers have experienced and their degree of risk perception. Therefore the most experienced drivers are the most scared. In the study, risk perception was also compared between Norwegian and French drivers. The French drivers were far more afraid than the Norwegian drivers.*

### **The purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to compare perceptions of risk and worry related to various safety and security issues among members of four different groups of professional drivers: underground drivers (N=111), bus drivers (N=100), taxi drivers (N=155) and lorry drivers (N=116).

### **Worry for/assessed probability of unpleasant incidents**

Results show that bus drivers generally worry more for and find unpleasant incidents (robbery, violence, threats of robbery, vandalism and so forth) more probable than underground drivers and taxi drivers. Lorry drivers represent the group worrying the least for unpleasant incidents in their work. There is a strong correlation between respondents' worry for and their assessments of the probability of experiencing an unpleasant incident in their work.

Examining the correlation between various background variables (e.g. sex, age, education), worry for and the assessed probability of experiencing unpleasant incidents, we found that the only significant correlation is between these two variables and the variable describing how long respondents have worked as drivers.

Some categories of unpleasant incidents seem more typical in some lines of transport than others. The most frequently experienced unpleasant incident among underground drivers was "witnessing vandalism, harassment, crime". The most frequent among bus drivers was "other unpleasant incidents". The most frequent among taxi drivers was "other unpleasant incidents".

In spite of the differences between the groups, one category of unpleasant incidents was found in the top four list of each group of professional drivers: “threatened by psychologically unstable person” (lorry drivers are excluded from this list). This may thus indicate a joint source of worry among professional drivers, caused by the passenger contact that these three groups of drivers engage in.

The variables “threatened by psychologically unstable person”, “violence threats of violence” and “experiencing threatening gang” were strongly correlated with professional drivers’ worry for unpleasant incidents. This is not surprising, as threats are warnings about what might happen, i.e. phenomena to worry about. These results were further supported in our linear regression models with worry/probability for unpleasant incidents as the dependent variable. Among the variables included in the final model, only three variables contributed significantly: being a bus driver; having experienced an unpleasant/“threatening situation; being born in a non-western country.

## **Worry for/assessed probability of accidents**

Results show that bus drivers worry more for accidents than lorry drivers, underground drivers and taxi drivers. Members’ of the groups mean assessments of the probability of an unpleasant incident showed the same tendencies. We found a strong correlation between worry for accidents and assessed probability of accidents.

Examining the correlation between various background variables (e.g. age, sex, education) and worry for and assessed probability of experiencing an accident while working as a driver, we found that the only significant correlations were provided by age and how long respondents have worked as drivers. The older drivers get, the less they worry for and find accidents probable. Furthermore, the longer respondents have worked as drivers (highest value being five years or more), the more they worry for accidents.

Most of the drivers have not been involved in actual accidents leading to injuries in their work in the last three years (83%-96%). Results show that the more respondents have been involved in accidents, the more they worry for accidents and the higher they assess the probability of accidents while working as a driver.

In the regression model with worry/probability for accidents as the dependent variable, the following variables contributed: age, being a bus driver, how long you have worked as a driver, evening/night every day, accident involvement and the control index.

## **Comparison with lay people**

In order to compare drivers’ and lay peoples risk perception, we have asked the drivers to assess the risk for someone who travels with 7/8 different modes of transport. The question is also asked to the population of Oslo and Kristiansand. The results show that drivers assess the risk of being involved in accidents and for being exposed to unpleasant incidents as far higher than the lay people do.

## **Comparison with French drivers**

A similar survey (via web) was conducted among 820 bus drivers in Paris. The questions asked were identical. A comparison between Norwegian and French bus drivers showed that the French drivers worried more, and assessed the probability as much higher for being involved in an unpleasant incident in their job. They also assessed the probability of being involved in an accident as much higher. The French drivers increased risk perception can to a large extent be explained by their experiences. 80 percent of the French drivers had been victims of violence or threats of violence, and half of them had been involved in an accident.

## **Conclusion**

Professional drivers' risk perceptions is largely related to their experiences with unpleasant incidents and accidents, their working conditions (e.g. when they usually work), especially their passenger contact, and to some extent background variables (education, age, how long you have worked as a driver).

Although some categories of unpleasant incidents seem more typical in some lines of transport than others, underground, bus and taxi -drivers face common problems (threatened by psychologically unstable person) because of their passenger contact.

Bus drivers generally worried more than members of the other groups for unpleasant incidents and accidents in their work. We therefore constructed a dichotomous variable, discerning bus drivers from the three other groups. This "bus driver variable" contributed significantly in three of the four final regression models, indicating a separate bus driver effect on worry. Moreover, we found that bus drivers worried more than members of the other groups when they were asked to assess the risk of experiencing unpleasant incidents, accidents and terror for people travelling by other means of transport.

Finally, comparing the effect of previous experiences on worry, we found that experience with unpleasant incidents like threats is a stronger predictor of worry than experience with accidents. We suggested that threats by definition, so to speak, include descriptions of potential future actions, while former accidents do not. This may explain why experience with unpleasant incidents almost generates twice as much worry as experience with accidents.