

## Three-Wheeler drivers view in small cities in Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

*Three-Wheeler, a Paratransit mode in Sri Lanka, provides door-to-door services and helps to reduce the unemployment problem and improve the poverty level. However their operations fail to get the credit from the society, and three-wheeler drivers are in a view that they are not recognised by the society. The reasons for this pathetic situation are considered in this study by conducting a questionnaire surveying among three wheel drivers in five small cities in Southern Province. Collected socio-economic data shows their income and education level are reasonably high and their earning supports two or more dependants in their family. About 68% of them have drinking habits, 87% have smoking habits and 9.1% have called for illegal activities during nighttimes. About 9.1% of them told that they used to drive the vehicle even if they were under the influence of alcohol. Moreover, drivers working hours are high, with an average of 12.9 hours with a standard deviation of 2.1 hours and they work almost every day. More than 25% of the drivers enter this job as for their first opportunity until they find a better job. About 14% said that they are not happy with this job, and 9% like to continue this job only for another five years. Many are worried about the continuing problem in day and night, most serious problem in day time is parking while night-time problems are difficulty in receiving payment from commuter as well as forcefully calling for illegal activities.*

**Key words:** Three-Wheeler, Paratransit

### Introduction

In Sri Lanka, after a reformed public transport arrangement in 1977, private sector has taken a key role in providing transport services. Since then the private buses started their operation in a well organized manner with a schedule time table, but transport in early morning or late night has become a problem for the public, especially commuters in rural areas or in small cities. Motorcycle and bicycle are the alternate modes to solve their problem, but the capacity of these modes will not allow carrying more additional passengers. There are no other modes to support their urgent needs, especially during nighttime and emergency situations. As a result, commuters from local areas in the small cities are having serious transportation problems. The three-wheelers' services comfortably started filling these needs. Three-wheelers perform many of the same functions as the taxi and it is considered as a next step up ladder for personal mobility to buses in small cities. However its existence and operation fail to get the credits from the society. The three-wheelers drivers and their valuable services are not appreciated at all. Only negative aspects are highlighted. Therefore reasons for these social issues faced by the drivers in society were considered in this study.

### Methodology

Five cities were selected for survey namely: Ambalangoda, Embilipitiya, Galle, Polonnaruwa and Wellawaya. These cities have identical characteristics in various issues such as population density, level of transportation facilities and availabilities, education and age structure and so on, thus these cities were selected. The three-wheeler drivers have themselves formed into small groups, and each group have their regular operation starting from predetermined place such as street or market place. Therefore surveyors simply visited their locations to fill the questionnaires. The questionnaire covers socio-economic profiles of the drivers, ownership, working hours, driver's behavioural characteristics and drivers' job satisfaction. All the drivers who were interviewed were male and there were no female three-wheeler drivers in Sri Lanka.

### Socio-Economic Profile of the Drivers

The three wheeler drivers' age, educational level, marital status, and their family members depend on their income are given in Table 1. When considering the age of three-wheeler drivers it can be seen that 11% in Ambalangoda, 16% Embilipitiya, 18% in Galle, 17% in

Polonnaruwa and 12% in Wellaway were below 21 years old. Education level of the three-wheeler drivers shows a healthy situation. Marital status shows almost 58% were belong to unmarried group, and this job was the first employment for over 26% of them. These represent the school leavers' participation in three-wheelers industry, thus it has become a better solution for the unemployment problem, and on an average 3 additional persons are feed from a driver's income.

Table 1. Drivers' Profile

	All(%)	Ambalan-goda(%)	Embili-pitiya(%)	Galle(%)	Polon-naruwa(%)	Wella-way(%)
<b>Age</b>						
Blow 21	15	11	16	18	17	12
21-55	82	87	83	76	81	83
Above 55	3	2	1	6	2	5
<b>Education Level</b>						
Below Grade 5	2	1	3	3	4	0
Grade 5 -GCE(O/L)	33	12	54	33	44	22
Pass and above GCE(O/L)	65	87	43	64	52	78
<b>Marital Status</b>						
Not Married	58	61	58	59	51	60
<b>Number of family members</b>						
Average	2.82	3.12	2.92	2.8	2.67	2.61
Standard deviation (Std)	1.22	1.2	1.38	1.16	1.36	0.87

Three-wheelers are mostly used by the passenger for urgent or short journey to reach the destination. Results show that in Galle and Ambalangoda areas vehicles mostly used for the distance between 2 km and 5 km, while in other areas for the distance of 1~2 Km. In all five cities more than 80% of them used for shorter than 5 km distances. Peoples who are using more than 5 km found to have agreed for regular trip like transport their children to school or group of people transport to work place, but these percentages were very small.

### Drivers Behavioural Characteristics

The drivers' behavioural characteristics are important to get recognition from a society. Drinking, smoking habits were examined. Results are shown in Table 2. About 68% of them have drinking habits and 87% have smoking habits. Superficially, 66% of the drinking drivers operate their vehicle under the influence of liquor.

Table 2. Drivers Behavioural Characteristics

	All (%)	Ambalan-goda (%)	Embili-pitiya (%)	Galle (%)	Polon-naruwa (%)	Wella-way (%)
<b>Drinking Habits</b>						
No	32	25	23	59	35	16
Yes						
Weekend	41	42	43	15	46	61
2-3 times per week	19	22	27	12	11	23
Everyday	8	11	6	14	8	0
<b>Drink and Drive</b>						
No	34	32	24	59	51	5
Yes	66	68	76	41	49	95
<b>Smoking Habits</b>						
No at all	13	20	21	11	10	4
Occasionally	20	38	11	20	22	7
Sometimes	28	27	30	22	35	25
Mostly	39	15	38	47	33	64

### Drivers' Problem

Many of the three-wheeler drivers came from middle income or lower income group of society. Some of them end up with this occupation as an alternative for their survival. Entering this job is very easy when compared to other opportunities. Sri Lankan are used to live with problems therefore little or minor

problem would not bother them too much. That may be one of the reasons, when a question asked from drivers do you have problem in your work environment, majority of them said no, estimated for about 73.1% said no during daytime and 69.9% said no during night time. During daytime issues such as parking, passengers go without pay, robberies by thugs or gangsters weighted as serious problem. During nighttime parking problem is almost nil, but other issues like lack of streetlights, calling for illegal activities are added with other daytime problems. These problems change their attitude towards survival and hence change the operational characteristics, and badly affecting the social view from several directions. So far no actions have been planned or initiated by the government to tackle these problems.

### Drivers Job Satisfaction

Three-wheeler drivers were either from different job background such as permanent, contract basis, part time, self-employment, business and others or from unemployment sector. Therefore mostly they have very limited experiences. Survey from all five cities shows there are no drivers with more than four years of experience, and non of them want to continue more than a period of five years. The job satisfaction among drivers are very poor almost 20% of them evaluating their job as bad, and '*they are on move*' towards a better job. Drivers were in a view that during last few years, not only increased trend in vehicle robberies and thefts but also killing and assaulting to the drivers were also increased. So these problems influence the drivers to restrict the area of working and reduce the working hours especially during the night. Both passengers and drives fear to travel with unknown person and it may have led to restrict the area of three-wheeler operation.

### Discussion and Conclusion

There are several factors which support this rapid development of the three wheeler industry such as lack of public transportation facility to accommodate short distance in all road networks, inadequate job market for unemployed youth, increased demand due to low fare compared to other alternative modes like taxi or van, availability in most of the places, reliable door to door service, availability around the clock and so on. However, with all these merits this industry fails to get the reputation from its users. The main complaints against this system are targeting badly on drivers behaviours such as not obeying traffic rules and regulations, participating in illegal activities, drinking and smoking habits on duty, speeding, crisis crossing, contributing traffic congestion by irregular traffic movements, significant accident involvement, unauthorised parking behaviours and used for robberies, killing, nasty works, illegal and so on. These are the reasons in macro view multiply and pave the path for not recognizing their services in a society. On the other hand the drivers of the three-wheelers also facing lot of problem in their day-to-day life. There is no job security for the drivers who worked as a driver in this sector, or there is no guarantee that a rented vehicle could be given for the same driver for next day. The three-wheeler stands or parking places are often illegal and there is no organization to look into their pathetic condition. Three-wheeler driver has no way of proving his profession. There being no public or private organization to make sure the three-wheeler service is provided in an orderly manner or to control this service in any way is a big problem. As a result of these factors the drivers have no confidence in their job. This study revealed that rural population depends mainly on bus transport and alternative modes as three wheelers, bicycle and motorcycle. In case of urgency three-wheeler is a reliable and affordable option. However, a negative public perception is developing against three-wheeler drivers. This should not be continued. An association Three-Wheeler Drivers Association (TWDA) was started to look after the affairs of the drivers in Colombo and expanding its operation to other cities, too. The association is in the process of giving a totally new look to the entire service, with very limited resources. Introducing standard uniform, three wheeler drivers' identity card and an identification sticker for the three-wheeler itself are some of the steps that have been initial tasks of this association. In order to rectify these pathetic issues on drivers, the organization is also having planning to conduct seminars, lectures for the three-wheeler drivers on various relevant topics.

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