

Men's Health: Findings of Focus Group Discussion

Detailed Findings – Professional Drivers

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Introduction

The Department of Health launched a Men's Health Programme (MHP) in August 2002, aiming at improving the physical, mental and social health and well being of adult men aged 18 or above in the community.

The MHP commissioned ACNielsen to conduct a marketing research study targeting Chinese men aged 18 – 69 in October 2004 by using focus groups to gather men's opinions on different health-related issues so as to provide inputs for structuring and enhancing this health promotion programme in the future.

The study included 20 focus groups with each composed of 8 men. The organization of the focus groups was based on two dimensions: age and occupation. The age variables were categorized into four groups: 18-24, 25-34, 35-49, and 50-64 years. The occupation variables included blue collar, white collar, professional, manager, executive and business (PMEB), professional drivers and three economically inactive groups, namely student, retired and unemployed.

After reviewing all video/audio tapes, notes jotted during the focus groups and the verbatim transcripts, thematic analysis was undertaken to identify similarity and differences between different age and occupation groups as well as within groups if necessary.

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Introduction

Specifically, this report aimed to focus on findings among the occupation group of **professional drivers**, including:

- their perceptions towards their own health status
- their perceptions and behaviours towards different health-related issues, namely
 - Exercise
 - Diet
 - Drinking
 - Smoking
 - Road safety
 - Stress
 - Safer Sex
 - Help seeking
- the barriers preventing them from practicing healthy habits in the above aspects

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Perceptions Towards Health Condition

By using a 10-point scale with '1' being 'not healthy at all' and '10' being 'perfectly healthy', men were asked to rate their current and previous health condition.

Current Health Condition

Professional drivers normally rated their own health conditions with a score of 6 to 8. As expected, those who suffered from serious health problems would give a lower score (less than 5).

Comparison with Health Condition 3 Years Ago

There was a mix of professional drivers with lower / higher / same score in each group:

- Lower score than 3 years ago: health condition is deteriorating as age increases
 - Higher score than 3 years ago: had health problem before but now recover
 - Same score as 3 years ago: health condition is maintained due to good habits
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Perceptions Towards Health-related Issues – Exercise

Definition of Exercise

No clear definition could be found among professional drivers. Some thought that light activities as exercise and some thought that more intense activities as exercise.

Barriers for Doing Exercise

Only a few of professional drivers interviewed did exercise regularly. The key barriers were long working hours and engaging in other activities:

Long working hours: this seemed to be very common since 1997 when the economy started slowing down, working hours were longer and they claimed that they could not spare time to do exercise.

Engaging in other activities: bus, minibus or taxi drivers on day shift could enjoy a rather regular working hours. However, the number of drivers doing exercise was not particularly high. They spent time on other sedentary activities like playing mahjong, watching football matches / TV programmes instead.

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Perceptions Towards Health-related Issues – Diet

Definition of Healthy Diet

Almost all professional drivers had good idea of what a good eating habit or a healthy diet was.

- Definite time to take meal
- Definite portion (not too much or little)
- Less sugary or salty ingredients
- Less fatty foods (e.g. pan-fried or deep-fried dishes)
- More vegetable / fruits
- Lots of water

Adopting a Healthy Diet

Most of the professional drivers thought that they could enjoy a more healthy meal when they prepared their meal at home because they had better control in the choice of ingredients and the cooking method.

Moreover, they thought that dining out prevented them from eating healthy foods. They perceived dining out had the following problems:

- Use of monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Short of vegetables
- High in fat content

Breakfast and lunch were the meals they found most difficult to adopt a healthy diet because day shift professional drivers were more often dining out for these two meals. On the other hand, night shift professional drivers more often dined out for dinner.

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Perceptions Towards Health-related Issues – Diet

Motivators for Adopting a Healthy Diet

Promoting health, delaying ageing and preventing diseases/illness were the key motivators for a healthy diet.

Barriers for Adopting a Healthy Diet

Most professional drivers (except night shift professional drivers who normally skip lunch) wanted a large portion lunch. This was largely due to the *long working hours*, and they needed adequate energy to support the work in the afternoon / evening. Although they knew that rice on plate, roast delicacies on rice and stir-fried noodles/rice-noodles were high in fat and lack of fibre, they still chose these unhealthy foods.

Moreover, they claimed that it was hard for them to have fixed meal break. For taxi drivers, even though they were more flexible in meal time, they could not have meals / went to toilets while there were customers. For minibus and bus drivers, their planned meal time was usually shortened due to the bad traffic condition and they needed to catch up with the next departing vehicle. Thus, they were less concerned about whether the food was healthy or not, but were more likely to choose those fast food that was convenient, tasty and stomach-filling. However, many would have some snacks in their cars in case of need.

“揸揸吓車都會肚餓，所以會放啲餅乾、麵包喺車”

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Perceptions Towards Health-related Issues – Drinking

Motivators for Drinking

The majority of professional drivers perceived alcohol for atmosphere building in social gatherings. It was particularly important for relaxing after a long day's work.

In general, professional drivers would drink less than before when they were 'getting older' and having health problems.

Over-drinking

Most professional drivers used behaviours instead of quantity of drinks to judge whether they were drinking too much.

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Perceptions Towards Health-related Issues – Smoking

Barriers for Quit Smoking

The false beliefs relating to smoking indicated by professional drivers were:

- Those who smoked less than 10 sticks a day were considered to be light smokers and such habit would not cause any health problems
- Smoking helps release tension
- They would gain weight when smokers quit smoking

Motivators for Quitting Smoking

Health concern, urge from family members, and experiencing sickness personally or people around were key factors for quitting smoking.

Perception of Second-hand Smoking

Most professional drivers heard of the statement '*second-hand smoking is more harmful than first-hand smoking*'. There was a mix of reactions that some believed in the statement and some didn't.

- Second-hand smoke has less toxins or carcinogens because part of it is left in the body of smokers

Versus

- Smokers have filter of cigarette to filter the carcinogens and toxins
- Second-hand smoke is more toxic because it is mixed with smoke and toxic exhaled air

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Perceptions Towards Health-related Issues – Road Safety

Perspectives of Professional Drivers

Generally, professional drivers were very confident in their driving techniques. They thought that most of the accidents happened due to the factors outside their control.

- Weather
- Faults of other drivers / pedestrians

“車速限制同安全係無關係嘅，有陣時可能你行得慢，仲危險過行得快呀”

For different driving regulations, professional drivers had different degree of compliance:

- *Drink driving*: all professional drivers claimed that they would never drink drive because that would lead to accidents.
- *Speeding*: green minibus and bus drivers ran on defined schedule and their income was largely based on flat salary, thus there was no need to drive fast. On the other hand, taxi, red minibus and some night shift green minibus drivers were paid by business turnover (i.e. number of passengers), thus they were more likely to attempt speeding.

“我哋(巴士司機)做又36，唔做又36，唔使超速”

“揸快啲對你有利，如果揸的士，或者紅 van 係多勞多得呀，巴士啲啲可能冇乜得益”

- *Use of seat belt*: red minibus drivers tended not to fasten their seat belts and to loosen their seat belts as they were required to turn their back regularly to collect the fares from passengers.

“冇辦法，綠 van 佢哋用八達通收錢，紅 van 要用手收錢，你戴住安全帶點收錢呀”

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Perceptions Towards Health-related Issues – Stress

Source of Stress Professional drivers did face pressure from work. For example, they had to be alerted that they might receive “unreasonable complaints” from customers about the service.

Stress Relief Professional drivers did a wide range of activities to handle stress.

- Talking with someone
- Doing exercise - ranges from intensive ones for younger men and low impact ones for older men
- Listening to music
- Sleeping
- Going to karaoke/disco
- Watching movie
- Playing computer games/videogames/on-line games
- Surfing the internet
- Taking a vacation/Going to picnic
- Going fishing
- Gambling
- Drinking
- Smoking

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Perceptions Towards Health-related Issues – Safer Sex

Perception of Safer Sex

For many professional drivers, safer sex meant having a single sexual partner. Condom was used mainly for contraception rather than preventing sexually transmitted diseases. There was no need to use condom with their stable sexual partner such as wives, girlfriends or concubines.

Some professional drivers seemed to be more experienced for having sex with prostitutes. They claimed that they would definitely use condom when having sex because prostitutes had multiple sexual partners.

Correct Use of Condom

The opinions were mixed on whether to squeeze the closed end of condom.

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Perceptions Towards Health-related Issues – Help Seeking Behaviour

Source of Assistance

If professional drivers had work, family or health-related problems, they normally sought assistance from their friends, colleagues, wives/girl-friends, other family members and health care professionals.

- Friends (mostly for work-related problems)
- Colleagues (mostly for work-related problems; some for health-related issues)
- Wife / Girl-friend (health and family-related issues)
- Other family members
- Health care professional (for problems related to physical health)

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Recommendations and Practical Tips

The findings from the Focus Group Study revealed that there were various health-related myths as well as barriers to the adoption of healthy lifestyle among men with regards to exercise, diet, alcohol drinking, smoking, road safety, stress, safer sex and help seeking. This also applies to professional drivers who, because of their work nature, sometimes find it even more difficult to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Indeed, there is much room for improvement in the arena of awareness and knowledge among professional drivers on these health-related issues. Apart from the general recommendations and practical tips listed in the “Summary of Report – The General Male Population”, the following tips will help professional drivers drive for a healthy lifestyle even at work. However, they are by no means meant to be an exhaustive list. It is hoped that they will serve as the basic essential information which may stimulate and empower individuals to think of and put into practice the best and most practical ways to achieve better health for themselves.

Exercise – Frequently and Regularly

- Your feet get tired with long hours of driving, especially your driving foot. Exercise your feet, stretch them by moving them from side to side, and even massage them, to prevent fatigue.
- Do neck flexion-extensions by looking up and down slowly and as far as possible. Repeat five times in each direction.
- Do neck rotation exercises by turning your neck slowly as far to the right as possible, and then turn your neck as far to the left as possible. Do these five times in each direction.
- Do shoulder exercises by starting with your shoulders straight forward and then bringing both shoulders back as far as possible. Repeat ten times.
- Find time to get out of the vehicle and stretch different parts of your body, especially your back, arms and legs.
- Keep a pair of comfortable walking or running shoes in your vehicle or workplace. You'll be ready for activity wherever you go!

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Recommendations and Practical Tips

Diet – Healthy Eating

- Stock healthy food items as snacks in the vehicle, e.g. fruit, high fibre biscuits and sandwich.
- Stock bottled water to ensure enough hydration.
- Choose eateries which serve healthier food or ask for healthier food when ordering.
- Self prepared lunch or dinner boxes with healthy home-cooked food give you more control on what you eat and are good choices for healthy eating.

Alcohol Drinking – Drink Sensibly

- Do not drink alcohol before and during driving.
- *Remember* that the possible *consequences* of drink driving will convince you not to step in your vehicle after the consumption of alcohol. Possible consequences include:
 - Loss of life: killing someone else or losing your own life
 - Legal consequences: imprisonment and even criminal records
 - Money: legal costs and increased insurance costs
 - Lose your licence and your job
 - Emotional price: living with guilt that you injured or caused an accident; depression

Smoking – Stop It

- Stop carrying cigarettes with you in the vehicle.
- Encourage a non-smoking environment in your vehicle by not smoking yourself.
- Declare your vehicle a no-smoke vehicle to discourage passengers in your vehicle from smoking.
- Open the windows of the vehicle if someone in the vehicle smokes.
- Put something other than a cigarette into your mouth. Keep ‘mouth candy’ handy in the vehicle – try sugarless gum, carrot, apple, etc.
- Keep your mouth busy. If you always smoke while driving, sing along to your favourite music instead.

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Recommendations and Practical Tips

Road Safety – Safe Your Life and Others’

- Have adequate rest before work. Do not drive when you are tired.
- Fatigue increases the chance of an accident. Take regular breaks to refresh and recharge yourself.
- Do not drive under the influence of alcohol or medications.
- Always wear your seat belt.
- Always insist that other passengers wear seat belts.
- Observe traffic rules. Do not speed.
- Pay attention to the conditions on the road.
- Be patient on the roads. Stay cool.
- Steer clear of aggressive drivers. Aggressive drivers are as dangerous as drunk drivers.
- You may be a very good and experienced driver, but just remember that the longer you are behind the wheel and on the road, the greater the chance of you having an accident.

Stress - Manage It

- Create a comfortable, inviting environment in your vehicle. This is especially important if you spend a lot of time driving.
 - Choose music that will soothe your frazzled nerves.
 - Clean out the clutter. Having items all over your vehicle that are rolling around every time you turn or stop can be very distracting and annoying and could even be the cause of a wreck.
- Being hungry can make you irritable. Bring a few healthy snacks along to keep you feeling good and to help you avoid temptation to stop for fast food.
- Being thirsty can also make you irritable. Carry bottled water with you always.
- Remember that people make mistakes so be prepared to give them the same tolerance you would like when you make a mistake.
- Don't challenge aggressive drivers. Avoid them and if necessary, report them to the Police or Transport Department.

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Recommendations and Practical Tips

- Be realistic in your estimation of travel time. Not allowing enough time for unexpected delays such as traffic, car crashes, detours and other surprises increases your stress level greatly.
- Patience is the key word! Slow down, breathe deep and remember that a few seconds of delay will not make enough difference in your overall journey time to justify elevated stress levels. Happy driving!

Safer Sex – Wise Way to Enjoy Sex

- Avoid casual sex.
- Condom should be used when having sex with prostitutes or other casual sexual partners as it is the most effective way to reduce your risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases when used properly. This applies to oral sex as well.
- Keep condoms handy at all times. Don't find yourself short of a condom when you most need it.
- You don't have to be embarrassed about buying condoms. It is a responsible act.
- If you are new to condoms, the best way to learn how to use them is to practise putting them on by yourself or your partner. It does not take long to become a master.
- Establish a faithful one to one sexual relationship with your partner.
- Healthy sex life is part of a healthy relationship with your partner, such as your wife and girlfriend. A cordial and fruitful sex life, which builds on good communication, consideration and respect, can reduce your temptation to have casual sex.
- Deciding that someone is "clean" (i.e. free of sexually transmitted diseases) through judging by the look is dangerous, to say the least.
- Don't ever comfort yourself by thinking "I will just do this once and I cannot be that unlucky". Remember, when it comes to unsafe sex, one time is one time too many.

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Recommendations and Practical Tips

Help Seeking – Early and Promptly

- Problems are part of life and admitting that there is a problem is not a sign of weakness.
- Think positive. There is always a way out.
- Talking with others almost always helps. Friends, family and professionals can all help.
- Deal with any problem, be it physical, mental or social, early.
- Make good use of primary health care services. Men tend to under-utilize primary health care services.

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