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Traffic congestion and long driving hours: Impact on stress, emotional and physical health among drivers in Sharjah

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Background: The health impacts of traffic congestion and long driving hours have lately grown to become a principle worldwide driving-related concern. Over the past ten years, the UAE has been titled ‘The most congested country in the Middle East’; and Sharjah, the third largest city in the UAE, is particularly known for its rush-hours; with its residents constantly spending long commuting hours in slow-moving, bumper-to-bumper traffic.

Aim: The purpose of this study was to detect the emotional and physical health effects associated with driving in congested traffic, and long driving hours among Sharjah residents.

Methods: A descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted, and self-administered questionnaires were distributed aiming to target a total of 450 participants. The sample was chosen based on convenience among Sharjah residents, specifically drivers (>18 years of age) holding a driver’s permit.

Results: A total of 414 subjects were enrolled. 66.7% felt that they spend way too much time driving, and 86.5% reported suffering from traffic congestion in Sharjah. The average Sharjah resident drives 3 hours and 10 mins per day; significantly higher than the worldwide average of 1 hour and 40 mins per day ($p < 0.0005$). A wide range of health distresses were highlighted in traffic congestion as well as long driving hours. Traffic congestion lead to greater emotional health effects; mostly stress (80.4%), nervousness (74.2%), and aggressiveness (52.2%); whereas long driving hours lead to greater physical health effects; mostly back pain (66.8%), pain in the legs (56.7%), headaches (43.3%), and dizziness (28.8%). Limitation of daily activities among Sharjah residents was the main consequence of repeated exposure to traffic congestion (81.2%), and long driving hours (65.7%).

Conclusion: Exposure to traffic congestion and long driving hours resulted in a wide range of physical and emotional health problems; each having its own respective provoking factors.

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