

USE OF SPARSE DATA TO ARRIVE AT PLAUSIBLE FINDINGS:  
THE DURABILITY OF PRIVATE BUS OWNERS IN SRI LANKA

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A survey of private buses in 1985 and their losses indicated that there was a high turnover of bus owners such that drivers reported an average of 4 years in private buses but only just over one year driving for the present employer. Conductors reported average service of just over one year in private buses as well as with the present employer. Responses of bus owners as to their period in business indicated that 33% had one year, 23% had two years and 21% three years in business, leaving only 23% with more than 3 years. This picture did not match the growth in private bus operating permits which had risen from 68% in 1982 to 100% in 1985. The survey figures (382 owners' responses) and the total permits (10, 292 in 1985) were both converted to an index based on 100 in 1985. The growth in both indexes was compared and, subject to several qualifications, the following average picture emerged :-

16% of any year's permits are not renewed in the next, giving a drop-out rate of 1 in 6,

Surveyed owners had been in business for 2.1 years,

Business survival of drop-outs was 3.3 years,

71% of 1981 owners, 66% of 1982 owners and 53% of 1983 owners had quit by 1985,

The survey, by its design, covered only surviving owners. The method cannot detect all the owners who held permits for only one year. Therefore :-

the average survivability of owners is expected to be at least 3 years,

the drop-out rate is understated and the durability rate overstated.