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“you can’t be deterred by stuff you don’t know about”: Identifying factors that influence graduated driver licensing rule compliance

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify and explore the major mechanisms that influence young drivers’ compliance with the Queensland, Australia Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) (also known as graduated licensing or graduated driver licensing systems) restrictions. Due to the limited research focus on compliance with GDL restrictions, a qualitative approach was utilised. The study consisted of 11 focus groups ($N = 60$) of young Queensland drivers aged between 17 and 25 years ($Mean = 20.50$ years, $SD = 2.69$). Results were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis. Participants had low perceptions of enforcement certainty for the GDL restrictions, due to the difficulty in identifying these behaviours. Enforcement of these restrictions is linked to displaying the provisional licence (P) (also known as intermediate licence) plates, however this was reported to be violated quite often. Surprisingly, a number of the restrictions were unknown to participants, despite the restrictions being in place for over 10 years. The GDL phone restriction, particularly using the phone for Global Positioning Service (GPS) applications and the use of Bluetooth to listen to music, as well as the passenger loudspeaker restriction were the least complied with restrictions. Meanwhile, the zero-alcohol limit was the most complied with restriction. Compliance with these restrictions was linked with perceptions of enforcement certainty and severity, social acceptance, as well as perceptions of legitimacy of the restriction and perceived danger associated with violating the restriction. The punishments for violating these restrictions were widely unknown and several participants stated they were more likely to comply with the restrictions when they found out the severity of the punishments. This study identified differences in compliance with each GDL restriction, as well as detecting a number of factors that influence compliance. These results can aid in the development of countermeasures that may improve GDL rule compliance, and the young driver road trauma rate.

1. Introduction

Young drivers aged under 25 years are consistently overrepresented in road crash statistics within Australia (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, 2017) and worldwide (Elvik, 2010; World Health Organisation [WHO], 2015). To reduce the high road trauma rate among this age group, Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) (also known as graduated licensing or graduated driver licensing systems) restrictions have been implemented in a number of countries. These restrictions commonly involve specific requirements for learning to drive and obtaining a provisional licence (also known as intermediate licence), as well as ensuring novice drivers gain experience in low risk driving situations before they graduate to driving in higher risk situations (Bates et al., 2014a). It has been reported that many new

drivers violate GDL restrictions at some point, yet despite this there has still been a significant decrease in young driver road crashes after these restrictions have been implemented (Bates et al., 2014a; Scott-Parker et al., 2012). While there has been extensive research from the U.S. surrounding the effectiveness of GDL passenger restrictions (e.g. Fell et al., 2011; Vanlaar et al., 2009; Williams, 2007; Williams and Shults, 2010) and GDL night-time restrictions (e.g. Carpenter and Pressley, 2013; Williams, 2007; Williams and Shults, 2010), research surrounding compliance with GDL restrictions has primarily focused on the night time specific GDL restriction (Mayhew et al., 1998; Williams et al., 2002). As such, there has been a lack of research examining the extent to which young drivers’ comply with the GDL restrictions beyond the night time ban. Therefore, this research will undertake the first steps in exploring the mechanisms that influence young drivers’

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Table 1
Driving restrictions on Queensland's graduated driver licensing system.

GDL restrictions on learner and P1 licence phases	GDL restrictions on P2 licence phase
Zero blood alcohol concentration	Zero blood alcohol concentration
Must visibly display the correct plates while driving	Must visibly display the correct plates while driving
Complete mobile phone restriction of the driver, including hand-held, hands-free, Bluetooth and loudspeaker functions	
Passenger phone restriction: restriction of the loudspeaker function of a mobile phone for passengers of drivers on these licence stages	
Night time passenger restriction: drivers are not allowed to have more than one passenger under the age of 21 years who is not an immediate family member, between the hours of 11 pm and 5 am	

compliance with GDL restrictions in the state of Queensland, Australia.

1.1. GDL in Queensland

The GDL restrictions are different in each Australian state and territory as well as in other countries where they have been implemented. In Queensland, these initiatives involve a learner phase, consisting of a minimum of 100 supervised hours for learners under the age of 25 years before passing a 1 h driving test. They also include a provisional 1 (P1) and provisional 2 (P2) licence phase for drivers aged under 25 years. The P2 phase is obtained by holding the P1 licence for at least 1 year and passing a hazard perception test. Each licence phase involves different restrictions that need to be followed while driving, which are presented in Table 1.

It should be noted that while P2 drivers are no longer required to comply with the complete mobile phone restriction, they are allowed to use a hands-free phone but are banned from using any hand-held phone functions while driving; this phone restrictions carries through to the open licence. As this study is focusing on compliance with GDL initiatives, it will only focus on the GDL restrictions reported in Table 1, not on the requirements needed to progress through each licence stage, as it is almost impossible for drivers to avoid these requirements (apart from the 100 h of supervised driving experience) and obtain a licence. However, parents in Queensland and New South Wales have reported the recording of supervised hours to be relatively accurate, and were infrequently asked by their learner to record false driving hours (Bates et al., 2014b). Interested readers are encouraged to refer to previous research that has already addressed compliance with the 100 h of supervised practice rule for further information (e.g. Bates et al., 2014a; Scott-Parker, 2015; Scott-Parker et al., 2011).

1.2. GDL phone use while driving

The Queensland GDL phone restriction (banning all phone functions for learner and P1 drivers) and passenger phone restriction has not been widely implemented in jurisdictions outside of Queensland. As such, there is limited research surrounding young drivers' compliance with these rules. One jurisdiction that has implemented a similar restriction is North Carolina, U.S. This restriction differs to the Queensland phone restriction, as a complete phone ban while driving only applies to drivers aged under 18 years. It was found that there were no significant differences in observed phone rates between young drivers in this state and young drivers in another U.S. state which did not have this restriction, neither 5 months after its implementation (Foss et al., 2009), nor 2 years later (Goodwin et al., 2012). These results are concerning, as it suggests that the enforcement of these laws are ineffective. However, as these studies occurred in the U.S., and an observational approach was used, the results may differ in other countries and with different research methodologies. Further, although some research has assessed the GDL driver phone restriction, to the best of the authors' knowledge, there has been no published research which has assessed passenger phone restrictions.

1.3. GDL passenger restriction

In Queensland, it is illegal for learner and P1 drivers aged under 25 to carry more than one passenger under the age of 21 between 11 pm and 5am. This restriction is unique, as it combines a passenger restriction with a night restriction; most GDL restrictions of a similar nature ban either the number of passengers a young driver can carry, regardless of the time of day, or they ban young drivers from driving altogether during certain hours of the night. Research that has assessed compliance with these restrictions has found that young drivers were more likely to comply with the passenger restriction than the night restriction (Begg et al., 1995). The current research will extend upon previous research by exploring the factors which influence compliance with the passenger specific night restriction in Queensland, Australia.

1.4. P plates

The mandatory displaying of licence stage via plates on the vehicle as a GDL rule has primarily been utilised in Australia, with New Jersey being the only state in the U.S. which practices this rule (however, small red reflective decal stickers that can peel on and off a licence plate are used instead of the provisional (P) plates) (Bates et al., 2017). However, it has been explained that this rule may increase compliance with, and enforcement of, not only the GDL restrictions but also other road rules due to the identifying nature of the plates (Bates et al., 2014a). In a recent quantitative study among Queensland young drivers, it has been identified that displaying P plates while driving plays a role in influencing young adults to drive more carefully, however this influence is larger among P1 drivers compared to P2 drivers (Bates et al., 2017).

When compliance with this rule is examined, it has been found that many young drivers believe the plate rule is not well enforced (Bates et al., 2016). Interestingly, despite this, further research has shown a majority of young drivers display their correct plates when driving (Bates et al., 2017; VicRoads, 2017). Encouragingly, drivers who reported not regularly displaying their P plates were more likely to report the police would use cues other than the plates to identify provisional drivers (Bates et al., 2017). As the plate rule plays a large role in enforcement of the GDL requirements, it is important to identify the factors that influence compliance with this restriction.

1.5. GDL alcohol restriction

Drivers on their learner or provisional (P1 or P2) licence who are aged under 25 years must have a zero blood-alcohol limit while driving, whereas drivers on their open licence can have a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit of below 0.05. The GDL zero alcohol limit has been associated with clear reductions in young driver road crashes (Senserrick and Williams, 2015) and alcohol offences (VicRoads, 2017) in Australia. These results are associated with a strong combination of (a) high perceptions of enforcement certainty, and (b) strong perceptions of social unacceptability. Bates et al. (2016) suggests that the high perceptions of enforcement for drink driving are associated with the campaigns that have been targeted at reducing this behaviour, making

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