



The role of parents and non-parents in the supervision of learner drivers in Australia



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to contrast the role of parental and non-parental (sibling, other family and non-family) supervisors in the supervision of learner drivers in graduated driver licensing systems. The sample consisted of 522 supervisors from the Australian states of Queensland ($n=204$, 39%) and New South Wales ($n=318$, 61%). The learner licence requirements in these two states are similar, although learners in Queensland are required to accrue 100 h of supervision in a log book while those in New South Wales are required to accrue 120 h. Approximately 50 per cent of the sample ($n=255$) were parents of the learner driver while the remainder of the sample were either siblings ($n=72$, 13.8%), other family members ($n=153$, 29.3%) or non-family ($n=114$, 21.8%). Parents were more likely than siblings, other family or non-family members to be the primary supervisor of the learner driver. Siblings provided fewer hours of practice when compared with other supervisor types while the median and mode suggest that parents provided the most hours of practice to learner drivers. This study demonstrates that non-parental supervisors, such as siblings, other family members and non-family, at least in jurisdictions that require 100 or 120 h of practice, are important in facilitating learner drivers to accumulate sufficient supervised driving practice.

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1. Introduction

The introduction of graduated driver licensing (GDL) systems has been associated with a reduction in crash risk for young novice drivers (Lyon et al., 2012; Shope, 2007; Williams et al., 2012). One of the key features of many GDL systems is that they require practice to occur over an extended period of time while the novice driver is driving on a learner licence (Bates et al., 2006).

Supervised driving practice allows learner drivers to obtain driving experience in a low risk manner (Hedlund, 2007). Spending more time on a learner licence, driving under supervision, decreases crash risk once the novice driver obtains an intermediate licence. In contrast, research suggests that driving unsupervised on a learner licence is associated with increased crash risk for individuals once they commence driving on an intermediate licence (Gulliver et al., 2013).

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Several GDL systems require learners to complete a mandated number of hours of supervision before they are able to progress to an intermediate licence with specific requirements varying between jurisdictions. For instance, within the United States of America the required hours of practice varies between 20 h in both Texas and Iowa and 65 h in Pennsylvania (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 2012). However, Australian jurisdictions typically require learner drivers to undertake a significantly greater amount of practice. In Queensland, learner drivers need to accrue 100 h of supervised practice recorded in a log book while those from New South Wales need to accrue 120 h of supervised practice in their log book (Bates et al., 2010). By requiring learners to obtain a certain number of supervised hours of driving practice, there is an implicit assumption that private supervisors, such as parents, will be involved in the learning to drive process. For example, once the number of hours becomes relatively high, it is unlikely that they can be achieved by solely using professional instructors. The involvement of private driving supervisors, as opposed to professional driving instructors, enables the learner driver to accumulate a significantly higher amount of supervised driving hours (Tronsmoen, 2011). However in jurisdictions that require significant amounts of supervised practice, it may be difficult for parents to provide all of this practice. Thus, we need to gain an understanding of all sources of supervisors for learner drivers.

Drivers in both New South Wales and Queensland must hold their learner licence for a minimum of 12 months and complete their driving under supervision. Learner drivers in Queensland must record 100 h of supervised driving in a log book and those in New South Wales must record 120 h. Learner drivers in Queensland need to complete 10 h of driving at night, while this requirement in New South Wales is 20 h. Queensland learners who receive supervision from a professional driving instructor can record 3 h for each actual hour of supervised practice up to a maximum of 10 h of actual supervision or 30 h being recorded in the log book. At the time the research was conducted, there was no comparable requirement in New South Wales. Thus, Queensland learners, in some circumstances, were eligible to undertake the practical driving test after completing only 80 h of actual practice (Scott-Parker et al., 2011a,b; Senserrick, 2007, 2009).

A significant amount of research has considered the involvement of parents in supervised driving including the amount of supervised driving practice provided to learner drivers by parents and friends (Bates et al., 2008, 2009a,b, 2010; Jacobsohn et al., 2012; Scott-Parker et al., 2011a) and parental awareness of supervised driving hours requirements (O'Brien et al., 2013). Parents are more likely to be the primary supervisors of learner drivers (Goodwin et al., 2010; Scott-Parker et al., 2011a; Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2011). Research suggests that parents are supportive of GDL systems and that very few parents find the requirement to supervise their learner driver significantly inconvenient (Brookland and Begg, 2011).

Parents are important influences on the driving experiences and behaviours of their children. They provide a role model for driving behaviour both before and after their children start driving (Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2010, 2011). Additionally, there are similarities between parents and their children in terms of driving style (Miller and Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2010; Taubman-Ben-Ari et al., 2005). Therefore, parents should be encouraged to act as good role models for their children not only when they are learners but before they obtain a licence (Scott-Parker et al., 2011a, 2009, 2012).

While there has been research regarding the role of parents in supervised driving practice, there has been limited research into the role that other individuals, who have a different relationship with a learner driver, play in supervised driving practice. This paper addresses this research gap by considering who, apart from parents, supervises learner drivers even if they were not the primary supervisor. This paper focuses on private supervisors and thus does not consider professional driving instructors. The objectives of this paper are to identify who, apart from parents, is a private supervisor of a learner driver and whether there are differences in the perceptions and experiences between parental and non-parental private supervisors. This paper considers whether there are differences between the different types of relationships that private supervisors have with learner drivers from two Australian jurisdictions (Queensland and New South Wales) on a number of measures including: whether participants were first time supervisors; whether participants were the primary supervisor; the amount of supervised practice provided; perceptions about parental involvement in the learning to drive process and perceptions regarding the level of difficulty associated with the time and task of supervising a learner driver.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 522 supervisors of learner drivers from Queensland and New South Wales. Participants were recruited using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling

techniques. The use of both techniques, while not random, enabled the inclusion of a wider range of supervisors of learner drivers within the sample. Recruitment occurred by delivering flyers requesting participation to letter boxes and asking participants, after they had completed the survey, to forward the survey link to other supervisors they knew and believed might be interested in participating. Given many of the similarities between the Queensland and New South Wales GDL systems, participants from both states were combined into one sample. Participants were asked if they had supervised a learner driver in the past 12 months and where they lived. If participants advised that they had not supervised a learner driver in the past 12 months or that they lived outside of Queensland or New South Wales, they were not eligible to complete the survey.

2.2. Procedure

Participants completed an internet survey that was open for completion between July 2009 and May 2010. After clicking on the survey link available on the flyer, and prior to completing the internet survey, participants were provided with information regarding the study on the initial screen of the survey. Participants provided their consent when they submitted their completed questionnaire. The internet survey took approximately 15–20 min to complete. Participants could elect to provide their contact details at the conclusion of the survey in order to receive a \$20 shopping voucher to reimburse them for their time. The study was undertaken with the approval of the Queensland University of Technology ethics committee.

2.3. Statistical analysis

Data was analysed using SPSS version 20. Chi-square tests were used for categorical data, and an adjusted standardised residual statistic was used as a post-hoc test. The adjusted standardised residual statistic indicates the cells that have an observed frequency that is significantly higher or lower than the expected frequency. The distribution of the adjusted standardised residual can be interpreted as a Z-score (Haberman, 1978). The strength of association between the categorical variables was measured using the Cramer's phi (ϕ_c) coefficient. This coefficient provided an indication of effect size.

Parametric tests were used to analyse data collected by Likert scale, although this is not strictly interval data. This enabled the use of more sophisticated parametric analyses such as ANCOVA that would not have been possible using non-parametric tests. Eta-squared was used to provide an indication of effect size for the ANCOVAs. Where appropriate a Scheffe test was applied as a post-hoc analysis for the ANCOVAs. The significance level was set at .05 for all tests.

It is likely that characteristics like marital status, income and age are likely to vary in a systematic way across the different types of supervisors (for instance, sibling supervisors are likely to be consistently younger than parental supervisors). In other words, these differences are to a large extent likely to be inherent to each type of supervisor. Consequently, it was decided not to control for these differences in the analyses. However, in order to ensure that no bias was introduced due to the nature of the sample recruited in each state, it was decided to statistically control for this factor in the analyses (through the use of ANCOVA).

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