



A psychosocial model of young adult passengers' intervening in unsafe driving of their friends

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 May 2012
Received in revised form
28 September 2012
Accepted 24 October 2012

Keywords:

College student
Positive behaviour
Passenger
Motor vehicle crashes

ABSTRACT

Young adults are over-represented in motor vehicle crashes and the carrying of same passengers puts them at greater risk of crashing. The current study examined characteristics of the passengers who might play a positive role in reducing friends' crashes by actively engaging in strategies to protect such friends. A psychosocial theoretical model of prosocial behaviour including self-process and contextual cues explained intervening behaviour among primarily novice driver college students ($n=242$) with the exception of the self-process, perspective taking. The results of this study provide support for counter-measure development that accounts for the positive role of peers to increase road safety, and reduce the incidence of crashes, among young adults.

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1. Introduction

Young adults are significantly overrepresented among those killed or seriously injured in motor vehicle crashes (NHTSA, 2008). Studies have shown that the presence of young passengers with a young driver increases the likelihood of crashes (e.g., Chen et al., 2000; Lam et al., 2003) and the risk increases further with the number of same-age peer passengers to around three times the risk with two or more teenage peers (NHTSA, 2012). The high rates of young adult injuries and fatalities suggest the influence of peer passengers on young driver behaviour is an area in need of attention. The current study focuses on a young driver and a novice driver by age, those 17–25 years representing those at elevated risk of a crash.

1.1. Positive social influence of young adult peers

In many jurisdictions a graduated licensing system (GLS) includes a peer passenger restrictions component to improve road safety among young drivers (see Williams and Shultz, 2010). Williams et al. (2007) however suggest that legislative approaches to restricting the number of passengers of young drivers should accompany other road safety initiatives, with a view to changing in-vehicle attitudes and behaviour in a protective or beneficial way. As young adults' attitudes and values are particularly susceptible to the influence of their friends (Padilla-Walker and Bean, 2009), peer

values on safe driving are likely to have a positive influence on the behaviour and attitudes of young drivers (Ulleberg, 2004). Developing road safety strategies aimed at young adult peer passengers that facilitate positive social influence regarding safe driving practices, may encourage young adults to intervene in risky driving and motivate young drivers to engage in safer driving behaviours to protect themselves and their peers.

1.2. Intervening behaviour of young adult passengers'

Few studies have examined whether the influence of peers may potentially have a positive influence on young driver behaviour (Williams et al., 2007). While there is some evidence in the drink driving context of young passenger intervening, this has primarily focused on the context of the intervention. For example, knowing the driver well, having a conversation that encouraged intervention, perceiving the driver required assistance (Newcomb et al., 1991) and perceiving danger (Wolfinger et al., 1994) have predicted intervening in an alcohol and driving context. In one contrasting study, Ulleberg (2004) focused on understanding the individual, albeit in an atheoretical manner. He found those with little efficacy, a concept described as being powerless to influence the drivers' behaviour and males were less willing to speak out when they were feeling unsafe. Further males reported higher levels of discomfort in unsafe situations, were more tolerant of risky driving than the females and less willing to speak up. There is thus potential for a theoretical framework to be tested to explain young adult passengers' intervening across different driving situations.

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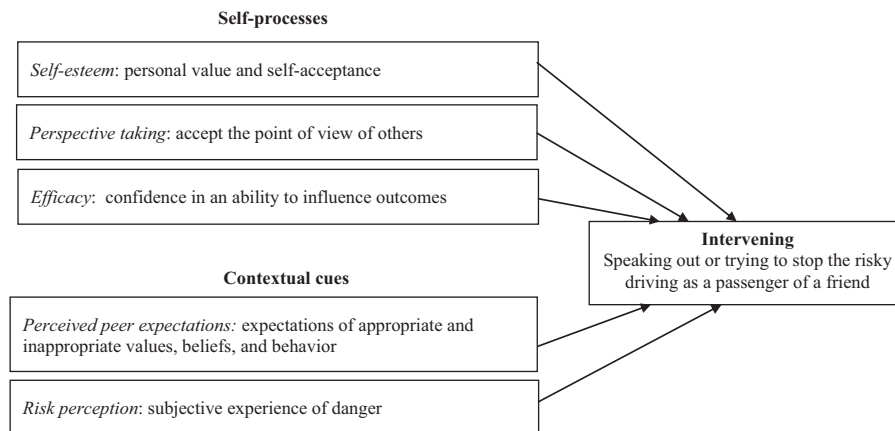


Fig. 1. Conceptual model explain intervening as a passenger.

1.3. Factors that influence young adults' intervening behaviour

With greater understanding of the factors that influence young adult passengers' willingness to actively intervene in unsafe driving behaviour, new road safety strategies can focus on promoting a constructive role for passengers to positively influence the behaviour of young drivers. In this study, a theoretical model that has been used to explain prosocial behaviour is applied (see Wentzel et al., 2007). Although previously used to explain helping and volunteering the outcome similarly reflects concern for the welfare of others, and acting in a way that is beneficial to the other (Barry and Wentzel, 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2001). This study thus expands the use of the model to willingness of passengers to intervene, a behaviour that has both benefits to self and others. The model includes both self-process and contextual cues (see Fig. 1).

1.3.1. Self-processes

Self-processes are internal cognitive and affective processes (Wentzel et al., 2007). An ability to understand and accept another's cognitive and/or emotional state, known as perspective taking is included. Young adults' ability to engage in perspective taking has been linked to greater empathy and altruistic behaviour (Eisenberg et al., 2001) and may reflect an ability to recognise the driver needs assistance. Newcomb et al. (1991) found that in the drink driving context (without the potential intervener being a passenger) that perceived need for help predicted intervening. While a separate measure of empathy is included in the original Wentzel et al. (2007) model to predict prosocial behaviour it correlated highly with perspective taking and was not added to the model tested in the current study. As a measure of ability to experience the affective (rather than also cognitive) state of others, such a factor may assist in the kind of intervention (i.e. taking on board the drivers' affect) however the inclusion of cognitive and affective understanding of others through perspective taking was thought to be most relevant where the outcome has potential benefits that do not solely focus on the other.

Also included in the model is, efficacy, which suggests a confidence in one's ability to influence outcomes (Robinson et al., 1991). Ulleberg (2004) found young adult males perceive more negative consequences of addressing unsafe driving, which may include becoming unpopular or creating conflict, and are less confident in their ability to influence how others drive. Consequently, young adult passengers with greater confidence may perceive efficacy to intervene and speak out against unsafe driving, particularly if they perceive risky driving as the norm among peers.

Young adults have a high need to be socially accepted and are prone to be influenced by peer behaviour (Arnett, 2002). Accordingly, self-esteem or perceived self-value can influence how young

adults behave with peers (Padilla-Walker and Bean, 2009) and may thus be associated with young adults' willingness to express their concerns about risky driving behaviour. Indeed, Newcomb et al. (1991) found that an image of one's self as someone who does help was associated with intervening in a drink driving context. The framework used to explain prosocial behaviour included a construct of depressive affect. The original rationale being it represented concern for positive evaluation as evident with adolescents who experience relatively high level of depression (Wentzel et al., 2007). However with the current target to understand likely intervening as passenger, a behaviour which represents potential but not necessarily imminent danger a value of self relative to others reflecting more the concern for positive evaluation rather than sadness was considered more appropriate.

1.3.2. Contextual cues

In addition to self-processes, the Wentzel et al. (2007) model integrated contextual cues; characteristics of social norms concerning perceptions and expectations of appropriate and inappropriate values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour that coordinate interactions with others, such as expectations from peers (Juarez et al., 2006; Wentzel et al., 2007) and perception of risk (Machin and Sankey, 2008).

Young adults have a high need for social acceptance and are attuned to the behaviour and interactions among their peers, and therefore often adjust or adapt their social performance to fit in (Markiewicz et al., 2001). Accordingly, peer expectations about safe driving practices may influence the likelihood of young adult passengers' willingness to confront unsafe driving. For example, young adults who perceive their peers to value safe driving may be more inclined to speak out against unsafe driving.

Risk perception or subjective experience of risk or danger, may occur in potentially unsafe driving situations (Machin and Sankey, 2008). Research involving young adults has found risk perception to have a negative relationship with risky behaviour, indicating a higher level of perceived risk of a particular behaviour is associated with a lower tendency of engaging in that behaviour (Reyna and Farley, 2006). Young adults with high levels of risk perception may therefore be more likely to intervene in risky driving situations. Ulleberg (2004) found young adults who reported a higher level of perceived risk of being involved in a crash was associated with a greater willingness to address unsafe driving.

1.4. The current study

The present study aimed to examine the framework of Wentzel et al. (2007) of self-processes and contextual factors to explain young adult passengers' intervening behaviour (i.e. speaking out

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