



Role of thrill and adventure seeking in risky work-related driving behaviours



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ABSTRACT

Background: Road trauma had been identified as the leading cause of work-related death in Australia. Research in general driving behaviours has shown that sensation seekers with high levels of thrill and adventure seeking traits are more likely to drive in a risky manner. However, thrill and adventure seeking has not been explicitly examined as a predictor of risky driving behaviour in work-related settings.

Methodology: Using a large sample of fleet drivers ($N = 892$) from three Australian organisations, the current study examined the role of thrill and adventure seeking in predicting risky work-related driving behaviours and involvement in crash and traffic offence. Hardcopies and online version of the questionnaire were sent to the worksite measuring participants' demographic information, work driving exposure, thrill and adventure seeking trait, work-related risky driving behaviours, and self-reported crash and traffic offences in the past 12 months.

Results: The results indicated that thrill and adventure seeking was a significant predictor of risky work-related driving behaviours. However, thrill and adventure seeking did not significantly predict self-reported crashes and traffic offences.

Conclusion: The current study implies that dispositional characteristics, such as thrill and adventure seeking, should be considered when implementing interventions in fleet safety.

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1. Introduction

Road trauma is the most common form of work-related death in Australia, accounting for 65% of the fatalities in the Australian workforce from 2003 to 2014 (Safe Work Australia, 2015). Researchers have identified driving as one of the riskiest activities undertaken during the course of a person's work (Wishart, Rowland, Freeman, & Davey, 2011). However, organisations often fail to adequately manage risks associated with work driving in comparison to other workplace hazards, even though workplace health and safety legislation in Australia requires organisations to be responsible for employees' safety while driving for work (Rowland, Davey, Freeman, & Wishart, 2008).

1.1.1. Sensation seeking personality and risky driving behaviours

In general driving literature, drivers' dispositional characteristics are often examined as an important factor of risky driving behaviours (Dahlen, Martin, Ragan, & Kuhlman, 2005; Schwebel, Severson, Ball, &

Rizzo, 2006). In particular, sensation-seeking has been associated with risky driving behaviours (Dahlen et al., 2005; Jonah, 1997). Sensation seeking is a personality trait defined by the tendency to search for "varied, novel, complex and intense sensations" where the individual is willing to take risks to experience such sensations (Zuckerman, 1994, p.27). Individuals with high sensation seeking are inclined to seek out pleasure and excitement, and tend to underestimate risks or perceive them as challenges.

In a sample of 72 university students, Schwebel et al. (2006) found that sensation seeking was the best personality predictor of self-reported driving violations (measured by the Driving Behaviour Questionnaire and Driving Habits Questionnaire), more than conscientiousness and hostile traits. In a research synthesis of risky driving and sensation seeking literature, a positive and moderate relationship was also found between sensation seeking personality and risky driving behaviours such as drink driving, speeding and non-seatbelt use, with studies having a correlation of 0.30 to 0.40 (Jonah, 1997). Jonah (1997) also noted that sensation seeking significantly accounted for 10–15% of the variance in unsafe driving behaviours, and only 4 out of 38 studies did not find a significant positive relationship.

Jonah's (1997) research synthesis also found that the thrill and adventure seeking trait, one of the four dimensions of sensation seeking identified by Zuckerman (1994), appears to have the strongest relationship with risky driving. Thrill and adventure seeking describes the

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“desire to engage in physical activities that provide unusual sensations and experiences” (Zuckerman, 1994, p. 13). Individuals may perceive their driving behaviours as risky, but still accept the risk to experience the thrill of engaging in the behaviour (Hatfield, Fernandes, & Job, 2014; Jonah, 1997). Additionally, engaging in risky driving behaviour with no immediate negative consequences could lower individuals' perceived risk and further encourage them to engage with this behaviour in the future (Jonah, 1997).

While the role of sensation seeking on risky driving behaviours and traffic violations is well established, its relationship with crash involvement is somewhat ambiguous. The majority of research found a positive relationship between sensation seeking and crash involvement but with non-significant results (e.g., Burns & Wilde, 1995; Dahlen et al., 2005). Dahlen et al. (2005) attributed the non-significant results to various factors involved in a traffic crash such as the behaviour of other drivers, poor road conditions and driver visibility.

Although the relationship between sensation seeking and crashes remains unclear, these studies suggest that individuals with high levels of sensation seeking personality are more likely to engage in risky driving behaviours. Consequently, underlying characteristics associated with high sensation seeking may explain why some employees still engage in risky driving behaviour even though their organisation's policies and procedures promote and support safe driving. However, most research on sensation seeking recruit young people or college students as samples, in contrast to obtaining a more representative sample of the majority of general road users (e.g., Dahlen et al., 2005). Furthermore, previous research investigating the role of sensation seeking on driving behaviour within an organisational context is limited.

1.1.2. Sensation seeking and work-related driving behaviour

It is acknowledged in non-occupational driving literature that dispositional characteristics are important variables in road incidents, but occupational driving research often focusses on the complexities associated with the organisation, work environment and driver behaviour (Wishart et al., 2011). Consequently, a gap exists in work driving safety literature regarding the role of dispositional characteristics, such as sensation seeking, on unsafe driving behaviour and outcomes. Employee's personality profile is important to examine as it predicts work motivation, their perception of safety climate, and tendency to engage in risky driving behaviours (Burns & Wilde, 1995; Seibokaite & Endriulaitiene, 2012). Seibokaite and Endriulaitiene (2012) found that “socially-oriented” male professional drivers are more likely to drive safely if they have higher levels of work motivation and safety climate perception. However, “emotionally-unstable” (i.e., neurotic and aggressive) workers are more likely to engage in risky driving behaviours and are non-responsive to organisational factors. These studies indicate that personality could influence individuals' driving behaviours even at work.

However, previous studies on the role of dispositional characteristics within fleet settings often contain small sample sizes and mostly male drivers. Furthermore, these studies mostly examined the role of personality in driving errors and driving violations, failing to adequately capture other risky behaviours that are specific to work-related contexts such as driving while fatigued, under work pressure or distracted. Rowland et al. (2008) argued that time pressure, work fatigue and stress promotes risky driving behaviours and unsafe driving attitudes in work drivers. In Adams-Guppy and Guppy's (1995) study, more than half the sample of British company drivers admitted to exceeding the speed limit, placing more importance on being on time for appointments than driving safely. Therefore, there exists a need to examine the role of sensation seeking in a work setting using a sample of work drivers that are more representative of the work driving population.

1.2. Aim and hypothesis

In work-related road safety literature, the role sensation seeking on aberrant driving behaviours has not been fully explored. Specifically, the possibility of high sensation seeking workers engaging in risky driving to experience the thrill of the risk is not yet investigated. Therefore, the primary aim of this research is to examine the role of thrill and adventure seeking trait on driver behaviour utilising a large sample of Australian work drivers. It is hypothesised that employees with high levels of thrill and adventure seeking are more likely to report work-related risky driving behaviours and less safe driving outcomes such as crashes and traffic offences.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants ($N = 982$) who volunteered to participate in the study were employees from three different Australian companies operating light vehicle fleets. The exact number of current employees were not provided by the organisations, but approximate numbers were given (Organisation A: 1080 employees; Organisation B: 870, Organisation C: 3100). Participants who indicated that they do not drive for work (84 answered zero hours and zero kilometres for weekly driving hours and annual kilometres driven for work, respectively) and missing data on this information ($n = 6$) were deleted from the analysis. There were 892 remaining participants. The remaining sample had an age range of 17 to 67 with an average age of 43 years ($SD = 11.11$). There were 524 males and 358 females (with 10 missing gender information). See Table 1 for a description of their work driving exposure, crash and traffic offence involvement (which incurred a traffic fine or loss of demerit points) while driving for work. Due to the small number of participants being involved in a crash and traffic offence during work hours (<10%), their involvement in crashes and traffic offences outside work hours were also considered.

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Thrill and adventure seeking questionnaire

Sensation seeking was measured using the Thrill-Seeking subscale from the Driver Stress Inventory (Matthews, Desmond, Joyner, Carcary, & Kirby, 1997). This scale is similar to the Thrill and Adventure Seeking (TAS) subscale of Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking scale (Zuckerman, 1971) but designed to measure thrill and adventure seeking within the road safety context. To shorten the administrative time of the survey, the current study only examined thrill and adventure seeking traits as previous research suggest that these traits appears to be the strongest predictor of risky driving behaviours (Jonah, 1997). The Driver

Table 1
Participants' work-related driving exposure and self-reported crashes and traffic offences.

		<i>n</i>	Percentage
Hours driven per week	1 to 10 h	618	69.3%
	11–20 h	186	20.9%
	21–30 h	55	6.2%
	≥31 h	33	3.7%
Kilometres driven per year	1 to 10, 000 km	496	55.6%
	10, 001–20, 000 km	181	20.3%
	20, 001–30, 000 km	116	13.0%
	30, 001–40, 000 km	52	5.8%
	40, 001–50, 000 km	32	3.6%
	≥51, 000 km	15	1.7%
Crashes in the past 12 months	None	787	88.2%
	1 or more crash	105	11.8%
Traffic offence in the past 12 months	No	708	79.4%
	1 or more traffic offence	184	20.6%

Note. $N = 892$.

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