



Parents' perceptions of the Family Climate for Road Safety: Associations with parents' self-efficacy and attitudes toward accompanied driving, and teens' driving styles



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ABSTRACT

In order to better understand parental influence on teen driving, a series of three studies were conducted among parents of young drivers to examine the association between their scores on the Family Climate for Road Safety Scale (FCRSS; Taubman – Ben-Ari & Katz – Ben-Ami, 2013) and three relevant factors: parental self-efficacy (Study 1, $n = 101$); parents' attitudes toward accompanied driving (Study 2, $n = 100$); and teen's driving styles (Study 3, $n = 235$ parents–young drivers pairs). The findings of Study 1 revealed significant associations between parents' scores on the positive FCRSS dimensions and their self-reported parental competence. In addition, parents' lack of commitment to safe driving was related to lower parental self-efficacy. Study 2 indicated significant associations between parents' scores on the positive FCRSS dimensions and the positive attitude of relatedness during the accompanied driving phase. Negative associations were found between these FCRSS dimensions and negative perceptions of the accompanied driving phase (i.e., tension, disapproval, and avoidance). The findings of Study 3 showed significant associations between parents' scores on the positive FCRSS dimensions and their offspring's careful driving style, as well as negative associations between these dimensions and offspring's endorsement of the reckless, angry, and anxious driving styles. Taken together, the results indicate the importance of the family climate as part of a global understanding of the dynamic surrounding youngsters' driving. Furthermore, they show that the particular driving-related family climate is associated not only with parents' self-perceptions and conduct in the early stages of their children's driving (the accompanied driving phase of a GDL), but also impacts the way teenagers ultimately choose to drive, when they are on their own. Implications for interventions are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The model of driving behavior parents provide and the socialization processes through which parents communicate their standards of conduct, are reflected in their offspring's driving. Parents' involvement in traffic violations and car crashes, and their driving styles, have been shown to be associated with their children's involvement in similar behaviors (Bianchi & Summala, 2004; Ferguson, Williams, Chapline, Reinfurt, & De Leonardis, 2001; Miller & Taubman – Ben-Ari, 2010; Prato,

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Lotan, & Toledo, 2009; Prato, Toledo, Lotan, & Taubman – Ben-Ari, 2010; Taubman – Ben-Ari, Mikulincer, & Gillath, 2005; Wilson, Meckle, Wiggins, & Cooper, 2006). The similarity in parents' and teens' behavior has been explained by parental monitoring of adolescent behavior, the quality of the parent–adolescent relationship, and parent–adolescent communication (e.g., Kotchick, Shaffer, Forehand, & Miller, 2001). However, more specific studies are needed to establish various explanations to such similarity.

Following this rationale, teens' and parents' perceptions of the Family Climate for Road Safety (FCRS; Taubman – Ben-Ari & Katz – Ben-Ami, 2012, 2013) have been shown to be an important factor in understanding risky driving among young drivers (Taubman – Ben-Ari, 2015; Taubman – Ben-Ari, Musicant, Lotan, & Farah, 2014). While most studies to date have examined this integrative concept from the teenager's point of view, a recent study validated its usefulness among parents as well (Taubman – Ben-Ari, 2015). This study has shown that perceptions of the family climate were shared by the two generations. Furthermore, they showed that family climate was related to parents' customary driving behavior, with the careful driving style positively related to the positive dimensions of the FCRS Scale (Taubman – Ben-Ari, 2015). Subsequent to this initial evidence, it is important to understand additional issues, such as the associations between this specific safety related atmosphere to more general parental assets; the developmental nature of such familial safety attitudes; and to further examine the connection between parents' perception of safe driving and their children's driving behavior. The current series of three studies aimed to take a step forward from previous studies and answer these issues by investigating factors which may be associated with the parents' perception of FCRS, examining its relation to the more global perception of parental self-efficacy (Study 1) and to the attitudes parents hold regarding accompanied driving, which is the first phase in the Israeli GDL scheme (Study 2). Furthermore, the study sought to examine the associations between parents' perceptions of FCRS and their offspring's self-reported driving styles, a connection which has not previously been investigated (Study 3), and may be important in understanding the dynamics by which parents affect their offspring's driving. The current article will begin with presenting the concept of the Family Climate for Road Safety, which was measured by the three studies in the current series, and then relate separately to each of the examined associated variables in their consecutive independent studies.

1.1. *The Family Climate for Road Safety*

The family is one of the most important shields against adolescents' involvement in risky behaviors on the road (e.g., Chen, Grube, Nygaard, & Miller, 2008; Ginsburg, Durbin, García-España, Kalicka, & Winston, 2009; Hartos, Eitel, Haynie, & Simons-Morton, 2000; Miller & Taubman – Ben-Ari, 2010; Simons-Morton, 2007; Taubman – Ben-Ari, 2014; Yang et al., 2013). Various aspects of family relations, such as parent–teen communication and the model provided by parents, have been found to be particularly significant in encouraging teens' safe driving. FCRS (Taubman – Ben-Ari & Katz – Ben-Ami, 2012, 2013) is a concept that integrates previously accumulated knowledge in respect to the values, perceptions, priorities, and practices of parents and the family in regard to safe driving, as perceived by young drivers and by their parents. As measured by the Family Climate for Road Safety Scale (FCRSS; Taubman – Ben-Ari & Katz – Ben-Ami, 2013), the construct consists of seven dimensions: (1) Modeling – the example provided by parents to their children, as reflected in their own modes of driving and attitude to traffic laws, including regularly obeying traffic regulations even in stressful situations, such as when they are in a hurry or tired; (2) Feedback – parents' encouraging comments and praise, and constructive feedback to their offspring in regard to safe and considerate driving; (3) Communication – habitually open and direct communication between parents and teens in respect to driving behavior and risk taking, e.g., parents' tendency to teach the young driver how to anticipate potential hazards on the road, to openly discuss anything related to driving, including risky driving, and to include the young driver in framing the family "contract" regarding their driving; (4) Monitoring – parents' insistence on being informed as to where their child is taking the car, who is going with them, and when they intend to be home, as well as supervising them to prevent reckless driving; (5) Commitment to safety – parents' personal commitment to road safety, obeying traffic laws, and considerate driving, including the time invested in safety education (measured on the scale in the negative direction as noncommitment); (6) Messages – clear and straightforward verbal safety statements by the parents that are understood by their children; and (7) Limits – systematic and clear-cut limits set by parents on adolescents' driving behavior and parental discipline for traffic violations. This dimension includes the existence of clearly defined family rules regarding careful driving and the young driver's awareness that they will not be allowed to drive the car or that limitations will be imposed if they do not follow these rules.

The basic assumption of the measurement model was that the factorial structure for parents and young drivers is similar. The analysis indeed confirmed the high level of fit between the models of the two populations, though requiring the removal of a minimal number of items (item no. 3 from the Monitoring dimension, and item no. 53 from the Feedback dimension of the young drivers version). In other words, the modifications enabled the measurement model to fit the population of parents of young drivers, without detracting from the established theoretical model. This means that the factorial structure of the FCRSS is very similar for parents and young drivers, and may therefore serve as a parallel model with the same content meaning in both populations (Byrne, 2010; Wang & Wang, 2012).

Studies conducted to date indicate associations between positive factors of the FCRSS (all but the noncommitment to safety) and teens' perceived global family assets, such as involvement, autonomy granting, communication, and problem solving, along with an association between the family's lack of commitment to safety and a poorer parent–adolescent relationship in general (Taubman – Ben-Ari & Katz – Ben-Ami, 2012, 2013). However, less is known about connections between parents' perceptions and other factors related to parental abilities and their attitudes toward involvement in their teens'

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