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“I would have lost the respect of my friends and family if they knew I had bent the road rules”: Parents, peers, and the perilous behaviour of young drivers



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ABSTRACT

Young novice drivers are at considerable risk of injury on the road. Their behaviour appears vulnerable to the social influence of their parents and friends. The nature and mechanisms of parent and peer influence on young novice driver (16–25 years) behaviour was explored via small group interviews ($n = 21$) and two surveys ($n_1 = 1170$, $n_2 = 390$) to inform more effective young driver countermeasures. Parental and peer influence occurred in pre-Licence, Learner, and Provisional (intermediate) periods. Pre-Licence and unsupervised Learner drivers reported their parents were less likely to punish risky driving (e.g., speeding). These drivers were more likely to imitate their parents and reported their parents were also risky drivers. Young novice drivers who experienced or expected social punishments from peers, including ‘being told off’ for risky driving, reported less riskiness. Conversely drivers who experienced or expected social rewards such as being ‘cheered on’ by friends – who were also more risky drivers – reported more risky driving including crashes and offences. Interventions enhancing positive influence and curtailing negative influence may improve road safety outcomes not only for young novice drivers, but for all persons who share the road with them. Parent-specific interventions warrant further development and evaluation including: modelling safe driving behaviour by parents; active monitoring of driving during novice licensure; and sharing the family vehicle during the intermediate phase. Peer-targeted interventions including modelling of safe driving behaviour and attitudes; minimisation of social reinforcement and promotion of social sanctions for risky driving also need further development and evaluation.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The young driver problem

Young drivers are overrepresented in road crashes in motorised jurisdictions around the world. To illustrate in the Queensland context, young drivers aged 16–24 years contributed 22.0% of 2012’s road toll, and 28.4% of the Queensland’s

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road toll arose from crashes involving a young driver (Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR), 2013), despite these drivers comprising 14.5% of Queensland's licensed driving population (DTMR, 2012a). Further, the earliest period of independent driving is associated with the greatest risk, 2.78 Learner drivers per 100,000 licensed population Learners involved in a fatal crash, compared with 18.56 Provisional drivers per 100,000 licensed population in Queensland in 2011 (DTMR, 2012b). Young drivers continue to be overrepresented in road crashes, despite a multitude of interventions ranging from education to engineering, enforcement to enhanced licensing programs. In July 2007, Queensland enhanced the state graduated driver licensing (GDL) program. Changes to the Learner licence phase include incorporating the requirements of 100 h of logbook driving practice (with a minimum requirement of 10 h night driving), a minimum 12-month duration, and a minimum Learner licensing age of 16 years. Changes to the Provisional licence phase include demarcation into Provisional 1 (P1, 1 year duration) and Provisional 2 (P2, 2 years duration) phases with a hazard perception test required to progress from P1 to P2; and high-powered vehicle restrictions during both Provisional licence phases. Audible mobile telephone use by passengers is prohibited during Learner and P1 phases, and novice plates are required to be worn during each GDL phase (Queensland Transport, 2007).

1.2. Influences upon young driver behaviour

Young driver road crash statistics have resulted in a plethora of research trying to identify factors which are influential in their driving behaviour, and in their risky driving behaviour – such as speeding and not wearing seatbelts – in particular. A search of Scopus (May 2013) revealed over 1000 young (or 'teen') driver papers published since 1977. Sources of influence identified in the literature predominantly pertain to characteristics of the young driver themselves (e.g., age, Bingham & Ehsani, 2012; gender, Lee, Simons-Morton, Klauer, Ojume, & Dingus, 2011); the journey (e.g., travelling speed, Raftery, Kloeden, & Royals, 2013); passengers (e.g., number of passengers and age of passengers, Lam, Norton, Woodward, Connor, & Ameratunga, 2003); and the vehicle (e.g., ownership, Scott-Parker, Watson, King, & Hyde, 2011). Social influences upon young driver behaviour have also been identified, and the social influence of parents in particular (e.g., Taubman-Ben-Ari & Katz-Ben-Ami, 2013). Consistent with social learning principles (e.g., Akers' social learning theory, Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979), children are raised within a social environment in which their parents can and do act as models of driving behaviour and attitudes for their children from the earliest ages through the P1 period and beyond. Moreover, the social influence of friends, who frequently travel as the young drivers' passenger(s), in particular has been identified, such that young passengers can exert a positive (i.e., reduced crash risk, e.g., Engstrom, Gregersen, Gramstrom, & Nyberg, 2008) or negative influence (i.e., increased crash risk, e.g., Ojume et al., 2010) on young driver behaviour.

1.3. Parents

Mounting research evidence suggests that the young drivers' risky behaviour is associated with their parents' risky driving (e.g., Brookland, Begg, Langley, & Ameratunga, 2009; Catchpole & Styles, 2005; Chen, Grube, Nygard, & Miller, 2008; Ferguson, Williams, Chapline, Reinfurt, & De Leonardis, 2001; Fleiter, Lennon, & Watson, 2010; Prato, Lotan, & Toledo, 2009; Prato, Toledo, Lotan, & Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2010; Wilson, Meckle, Wiggins, & Cooper, 2006), and the driving behaviour of same-sex parents in particular (e.g., Miller & Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2010; Taubman-Ben-Ari, Mikulincer, & Gillath, 2005; Taubman-Ben-Ari & Katz-Ben-Ami, 2012). Furthermore, parents are the most common driving supervisor of their young novice child in many countries, including Australia (e.g., Mulvihill, Senserrick, & Haworth, 2005; Scott-Parker, Bates, Watson, King, & Hyde, 2011) and New Zealand (e.g., Brookland & Begg, 2011); therefore in addition to acting as models for their novice child, they are commonly the primary instructor in safe vehicle and road use. Consistent with social learning principles, by virtue of their role as driving supervisor during the Learner licence phase, parents can regulate the compliance of their child with general road rules and with GDL-specific conditions and restrictions in particular through the administration of rewards and punishments. Rewards are motivating and reinforcing, acting as incentives to gain expected outcomes, whilst punishments serve to prevent, curtail, or extinguish learned behaviours (Beck, 1990). As such, parents are pivotal in the driving careers of their children.

1.4. Peers

Importantly for road safety, the young driver is also an adolescent. Adolescence is a developmental period associated with increased time spent with, and importance placed upon, interactions with peers. As such, the adolescent increases their reliance on peers – and their friends in particular – in forming attitudes and behaviours (Sharpley, 2003; Sigelman, 1999). Consistent with social learning principles, peers can (a) be a model to be imitated, (b) encourage/discourage risky and safe driving, and (c) reward and punish the young novice's attitudes and behaviours. For example, Chen et al. (2008) found that young drivers' intoxicated driving was positively associated with modelling of drink driving by peers and perceived peer approval of drink driving, and negatively associated with perceived peer disapproval of drink driving. Moreover, risky driving during the first 18 months of independent driving was associated with the reported riskiness of the driving behaviour of the young drivers' friends (Simons-Morton, Cheon, Guo, & Albert, 2013).

Adolescents can engage in risky behaviour as they desire social approval from their peers (e.g., see Bonino, Cattellino, & Ciairano, 2005) which is psychologically-rewarding for the young driver. Much risky driving is impacted upon by the social

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