

SURVEY RESEARCH ON SPEED AND ENFORCEMENT IN NSW AND THE ACT

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ABSTRACT

NRMA Motoring and Services and NRMA Insurance commissioned a telephone survey of 1000 drivers in July 2004 to ascertain perceptions and attitudes of drivers in NSW and the ACT to speed and speed enforcement.

The survey shows continuing high acceptance of speeding as the main cause of casualty crashes. There also continues to be substantial support for general countermeasures to reduce speeding, particularly general police enforcement. Increasing the level of advertising campaigns and increasing the use of fixed speed cameras, meet with less support though it is still relatively high. Countermeasures that will impact more intrusively on drivers meet with the least support.

The survey showed that a key attitude to address is ‘not wanting to break the law’ as a motivator for driving speed. The cues and situations that lead drivers to speed — such as being in a hurry, the risk of detection, the ‘roll on’ effect of the speed of other drivers, and light traffic — must also be taken into account in understanding the decision making process. There is a need to establish stronger social norms against speeding, learning from experience especially in the area of drink driving in which the behaviour is strongly seen as socially undesirable.

BACKGROUND

An important role of the NRMA Motoring and Services, and NRMA Insurance, is as advocates of road safety. Research was commissioned with the key objective of *Ascertaining perceptions and attitudes of drivers in NSW and the ACT to speed and speed enforcement.*

The findings of the research will be used by the organisations to develop policy positions on issues such as: driver behaviour; fixed speed cameras; speed limits; enforcement of speed limits; and understanding of speed as a contributing factor in crashes.

METHOD

A telephone survey was conducted during July 2004 of 1000 drivers across NSW and the ACT. Quotas were set by area and gender to represent these categories effectively and provide sufficient sample sizes to make reasonable comparisons; and broad quotas were also set by age and gender to ensure a reasonable number of younger drivers in the sample (Table 1).

The sample was weighted to an estimated distribution of licensed drivers by age, gender and level of education, with further adjustment to the overall population distribution by area.

Differences among the demographic groups were assessed using chi-square tests of statistical significance.

Table 1. Sample sizes in demographic groupings for analysis

Location	Sample	Gender	Sample	Age	Sample
Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong	580	Male	500	17-29	156
Rest of NSW/ACT	420	Female	500	30-39	180
<i>Total</i>	<i>1000</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>1000</i>	40-49	240
				50-59	196
				60+	228
				<i>Total</i>	<i>1000</i>

A preliminary question testing phase was undertaken to assess wording of a number of questions, to help ensure correct understanding of questions and hence interpretation of responses.

Results and Comments

Attitudes to speed

Speed continued to be judged as a major cause of casualty crashes in NSW and the ACT (Table 2). About half of drivers (46%) nominated speeding as the main cause, with drink driving (12%) being the next most nominated cause. Female drivers (56%) were more likely than male drivers (37%) to nominate speeding as the biggest cause; while drivers aged 17-29 years (36%) were the least likely age group. In total, two thirds (67%) of drivers nominated speeding as one of the main causes, about half (45%) nominated drink driving, and a fifth (21%) driver fatigue.

Table 2. Main causes of casualty crashes in NSW/ACT nominated by drivers (n=1000)

Causes	'Biggest' %	Other main %	Total nominated %
Speeding	46	21	67
Alcohol/ drink driving	12	33	45
Fatigue/falling asleep	6	14	21
Inexperienced drivers/lack of experience	3	8	11
Poor road conditions	2	8	10
Lack of concentration	3	3	6
Lack of attention	3	3	6
Young drivers	2	3	6

Unprompted reasons given for considering speeding to be the main cause of casualty crashes showed that much of the thinking behind the perception of speed as the main cause of casualty crashes involved the concept of 'loss of control' (31% of those drivers nominating speeding), 'driver attitude' (28%) and 'inexperience' (22%). Few drivers talked about external factors such as poor roads or poor weather; the focus was on driver responsibility and error.

The problem of speeding in crashes was most likely to be associated with young drivers (described as 17-24 years old to respondents). Almost all drivers (91%) nominated this group as most likely to cause crashes as speeding drivers. This age group was even more likely to be nominated by drivers aged 17-29 years and 30-39 years (94%), suggesting that younger drivers in particular are aware of the problems associated with their age group. So if risk taking behaviour continues to occur it is related more to self-motivation to speed and overconfidence than to ignorance of the issues involved.

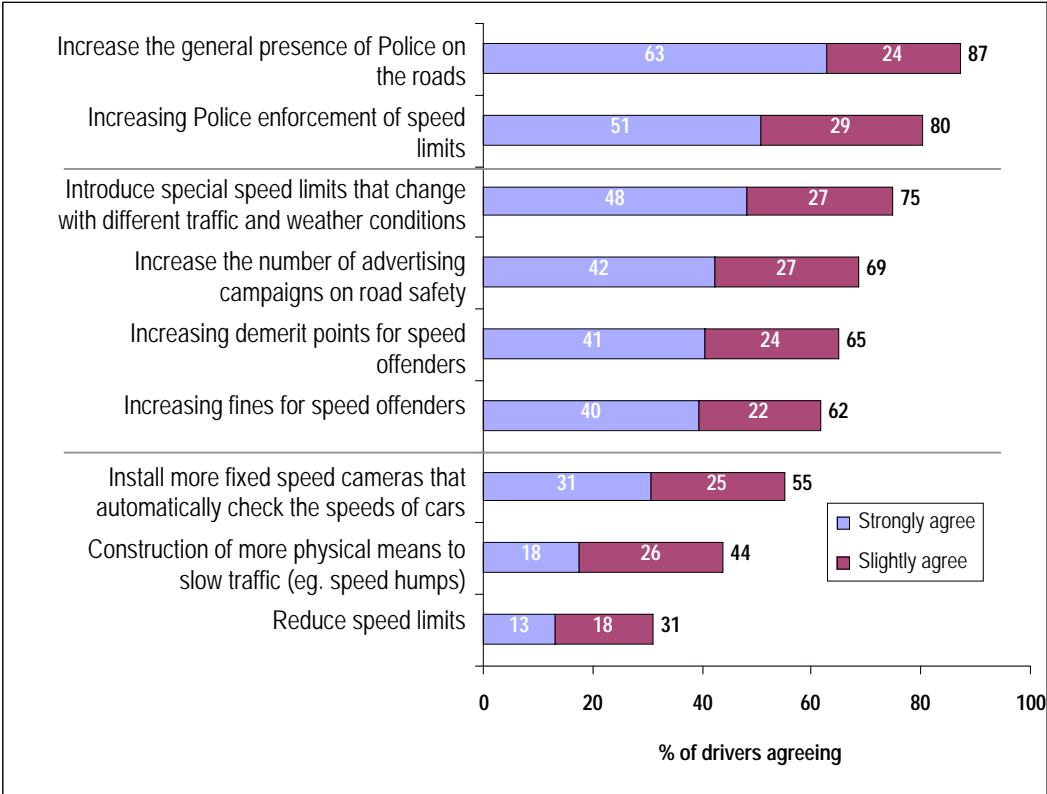
About half (48%) of drivers overall would support higher penalties such as double demerit points for drivers aged 17-20 years, when described to respondents as the most over-represented as speeding drivers in crashes. Drivers in this age group, however, were the least in agreement with this proposal. So while awareness of the problem might extend to this group, support for additional countermeasures may not necessarily follow.

Support for countermeasures, including speed enforcement

Of those countermeasures presented to respondents, there continues to be highest support (75+% agreeing) for increasing countermeasures that are (Figure 1):

- _ associated generally with police enforcement (increasing Police presence, increasing enforcement of speed limits); or
- _ related to driving conditions in which drivers will need to slow down anyway (special speed limits that change with different traffic and weather conditions).

Figure 1. Agreement with countermeasures to reduce speed-related crashes (n=1000)



Support for increasing the consequences of speeding also attracted relatively strong support, but not as high as for those countermeasures described above. These consequences included increasing fines (65% agreeing) and demerit points (62%) for offenders.

Among the countermeasures rated by drivers in the survey, the lowest support measured was for countermeasures that will intrude on drivers more generally: reducing speed limits (31% agreeing); or construction of more physical devices to slow traffic (44%).

The sliding scale of support appears to be directly related to how many drivers will be directly affected. So while enforcement might be well supported, influenced at least in part by the strong positive social norm around police and road safety, the ensuing penalties shift closer to a personal impact.

However, even the use of speed cameras has less support than general police enforcement, particularly for cameras that automatically record speeding drivers. The automatic element takes away the possibility of being treated leniently by the police, and most likely reduces the perception of the possibility that the enforcement will be detected. Police by the roadside would be considered more visible than a camera on a post by the roadside.

Fixed speed cameras

There was also relatively good support for the use of ‘fixed speed cameras’, with about half of drivers (55%) agreeing to increased use. Such cameras most likely present a more covert and threatening approach than other roadside enforcement, and do not have as good support as general enforcement.

Awareness of fixed cameras was very high (96% overall). There may, however, be some confusion with roadside speed cameras in general; and it is also possible that the extensive use of roadside signs about speed cameras has influenced public perception about speed camera operation substantially beyond reality, and may also contribute to drivers interpreting pole-mounted boxes or other roadside features as cameras.

Over three quarters of drivers (85%) said that they were aware of the location of a fixed speed camera, with awareness being higher in metropolitan areas of NSW (88%) compared with Regional NSW and the ACT (79%). ‘Signs’ were most likely to be nominated as the source of awareness of the cameras (69%), followed by sighting of a camera (45%).

There was also a strong perception that the placement of speed cameras was related directly to reducing crashes by about half (52%) of drivers. Linking cameras to where drivers are speeding was also a common response, including nomination of ‘revenue raising’ as a reason by a quarter of male drivers. This is likely to continue to be a communication issue around the use of speed cameras to improve acceptance and support.

Speed limits

Reducing speed limits is one of the less popular measures to reduce speed, owing to the broad impact on drivers, including the more compliant ones.

There continues to be an issue around awareness of speed limits on roads. A quarter (26%) of drivers considered that they were not aware of the speed limit on most or all roads that they

were unfamiliar with (Table 3). This increased to half of drivers nominating about a quarter or more of such roads. Getting respondents to think about ‘unfamiliar roads’ gives a reasonable context for assessing communication of speed limits in a ‘worst-case’ scenario. The incidence of lack of awareness does not automatically equate with being a major problem for drivers, but it does suggest a possible source of frustration that may need to be addressed. This appears as a complex area of investigation that is difficult to address in detail in this type of survey, and most likely requires more exploratory, qualitative research to assess the issues in more detail.

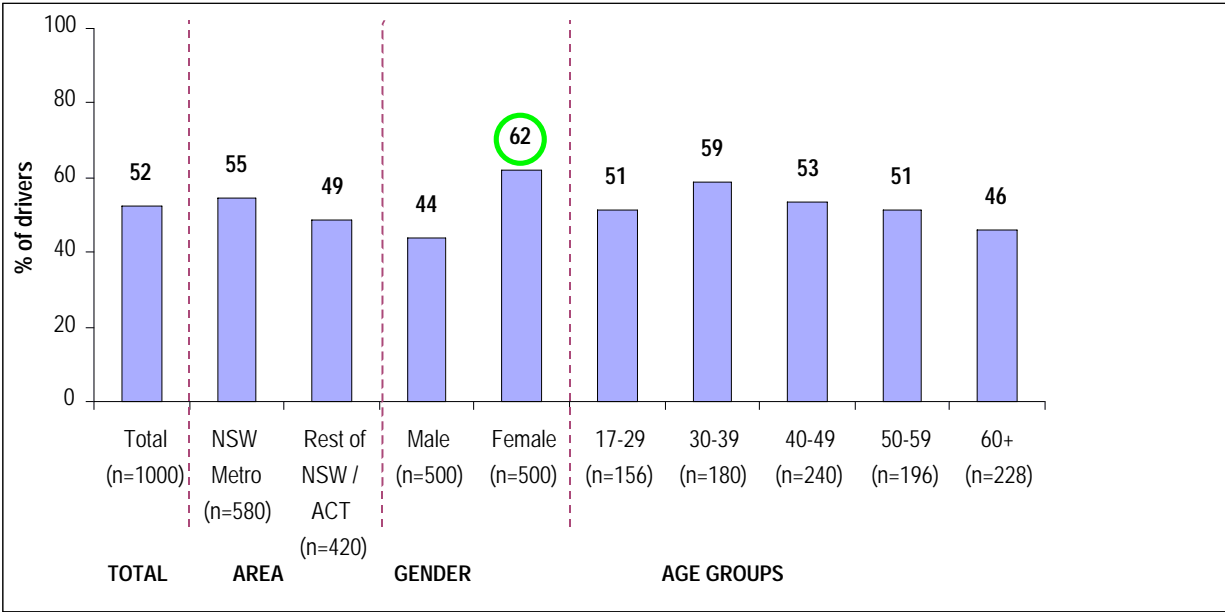
Table 3. Perception of the proportion of unfamiliar roads on which a driver would be unsure of the speed limit

Proportion	Total % (n=1000)	Metro % (n=580)	Regional % (n=420)
All	6	6	7
Most	20	22	17
About half	15	15	15
About a quarter	9	9	10
Only some	39	37	43
None	7	7	6
Don't know	4	4	2

Speed limiting cars

About half (52%) of drivers agreed that cars should be ‘speed limited’, with female drivers (62%) being much more supportive of this measure than male drivers (44%) (Figure 2). Only a small minority (15%) of those agreeing nominated speed limiting of over 120km/h.

Figure 2. Agreement that cars should be speed limited (group difference highlighted)



The most common reason given for not speed limiting vehicles was in regard to ‘safety/danger’. Half of those opposed to speed limiting nominated an issue in this category, primarily associated with situations in which drivers would need to exceed the limit. A second category of reasons was about ‘driver responsibility’, that it should up to the driver to judge speed of driving and to take control.

In general, there is a reasonable level of current support for speed limiting. This level exists before significant public discussion and promotion of the issue has occurred.

Influences on speeding behaviour

Consequences

The possibility of ‘loss of licence’ (82%) or of ‘crashing’ (80%) were the two most influential consequences on decisions about speed of driving (Table 4). In contrast, the consequence of ‘embarrassment with family or friends’ if caught was the least nominated consequence influencing decisions about driving speed (24%).

Table 4. Consequences rated as very important in decisions about speed of driving (main group differences **bolded**)

Consequences	Total (n=1000)	Gender		Age				
		Male (n=500) %	Female (n=500) %	17-29 (n=156) %	30-39 (n=180) %	40-49 (n=240) %	50-69 (n=196) %	60+ (n=228) %
The possibility of losing your licence	82	81	83	87	81	83	79	79
The possibility of crashing	80	76	86	82	78	81	81	81
The possibility of getting fined	58	51	65	59	57	57	52	63
Not want to break the law	57	47	69	51	51	59	58	71
The possibility of getting caught by police	56	52	60	55	54	60	54	56
Embarrassment with family or friends if caught	24	21	27	21	23	23	26	26

The consequence of ‘Not want to break the law’ was nominated as very important by about half (57%) of drivers. This consequence in particular reflects internalising of a social norm about speeding — in which a person is motivated to comply with the law because it is the right thing to do, rather than needing an external motivator such as the threat of being caught.

Female drivers and older drivers were the most likely to be motivated to choose their driving speeds based simply on the desire to comply with the law. Taking into account the lack of motivation of embarrassment in the community, and only moderate influence of simple compliance with the law, it would appear that social norms about speeding in NSW and the ACT still have a way to go to match those established for drink driving.

Advertising

Another aspect of influencing behaviour addressed in the survey was in regard to anti-speeding advertising. Respondents were presented with a series of descriptions about responses to anti-speeding advertising, and asked whether each description applied to them personally. The most nominated description was ‘I think about whether or not the situations in the ads could happen to me’, by three quarters (78%) of drivers (Table 5). This was least likely to be nominated by older drivers, especially those aged 60 years and over (62%).

Table 5. Responses to anti-speeding advertising by age (main differences by age **bolded**)

Category	Description	Total % (n=1000)	17-29 % (n=156)	30-39 % (n=180)	40-49 % (n=240)	50-59 % (n=196)	60+ % (n=228)
Negative (“Ignore”)	Usually pay little attention	39	40	33	41	41	41
	Show situations I can’t even imagine myself being in	44	66	49	36	36	29
Positive (“Involvement”)	Aimed at drivers like me	44	51	42	40	41	47
	Talk about with family or friends	49	53	53	55	46	37
	Thinking about whether it could happen to me	78	84	87	81	74	62

Other positive outcomes of the advertising were nominated by fewer than half of drivers: ‘the ads are aimed at drivers like me’ (44%), and ‘these are ads I talk about with family and friends’ (49%). However, negative descriptions were equally nominated. These included descriptions of ‘I usually pay little attention to these ads’ (39%) and ‘the ads show situations I cannot imagine myself in (44%)’.

The decrease in endorsement of some of the positive descriptions with age can be seen as a positive consequence of the targeting of speed advertising to younger drivers, being the more problematic groups of speeding drivers.

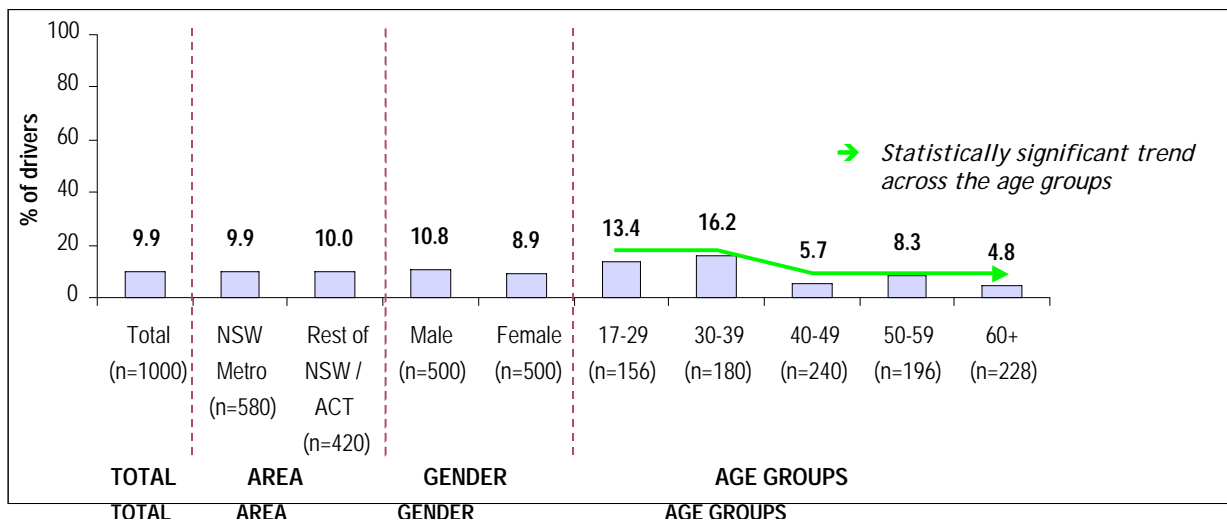
However, two thirds of drivers aged 17-29 years considered that the advertising ‘shows situations I can’t imagine myself being in’. Such an endorsement is of concern, occurring among a key target group for such advertising.

Driver behaviour and risk taking

Being booked for speeding in the last 12 months

One in ten drivers reported having been booked for speeding in the last 12 months (Figure 3). The incidence was highest among drivers aged 30-39 years (16%) and drivers aged 17-29 years (13%). There was little difference in the absolute incidence for males (11%) and females (9%). This similarity may reflect characteristics of enforcement (eg, being predominantly in the daytime). Additional differences were observed in specific metropolitan areas in NSW, with the incidence being higher in Sydney (10%) and Wollongong (12%) compared with Newcastle (6%).

Figure 3. Situations in which a driver would consider driving over the speed limit, by location, gender and age



Situations drive below the speed limit

Driving below the speed limit was almost uniformly considered in situations associated with poorer physical driving conditions — ‘poor surface’ and ‘poor weather’; and situations of potential personal harm when ‘you feel the risk of crashing is high’.

Willingness to drive below the limit was not as strong when ‘you feel the risk of getting caught by the police is high’, with only about two thirds agreeing in this situation. Younger drivers (17-29 years) were the most likely to consider driving under the limit in this situation and drivers aged 60 years and over the least likely. This trend indicates that younger drivers show the most caution in response to the police, and highlights the benefit of the use or threat of enforcement for higher risk younger drivers.

It appears that risks associated with crashing (including poor driving conditions) are stronger motivators of driving under the speed limit than police presence. This is a reasonable difference. However, establishing the degree of physical conditions that will elicit lowering speed is more difficult to achieve without more detailed descriptions on conditions (or optimally visual representation).

Situations drive over the speed limit

Many drivers were motivated to exceed the speed limit in a number of different situations (Table 6). The most likely situation in which drivers would exceed the speed limit was ‘to keep up with the general flow of traffic’, by over half (58%) of drivers. However, a quarter to a third of drivers would exceed the speed limit in situations such as light traffic, and low risk of getting caught by the police.

As highlighted in Table 6, willingness to exceed the speed limit was notably lower among female drivers and, in most situations, among older drivers (particular those aged 60 years and over). Drivers in metropolitan NSW were also marginally more willing than regional drivers

to drive over the limit in several situations, notably ‘to keep up with the flow of traffic’ (60% vs 53%) and ‘where the speed limit is inappropriate’ (39% vs 29%).

*Table 6. Situations in which a driver would consider driving over the speed limit (main group differences **bolded**)*

Description	Total % (n=1000)	Male % (n=500)	Female % (n=500)	17-29 % (n=156)	30-39 % (n=180)	40-49 % (n=240)	50-59 % (n=196)	60+ % (n=228)
To keep up with the general flow of traffic	58	65	50	58	57	63	57	55
In light traffic conditions	33	38	28	41	36	32	29	26
Where you feel speed limit is inappropriate	35	43	27	43	38	36	32	26
If you feel the risk of being caught by the police is low	27	32	22	34	35	28	26	11
If you feel the risk of crashing is low	28	34	21	28	32	31	29	19

Influences on risk taking

The relationship between willingness to driver over the limit and attitudes to speeding were assessed. The most important item associated with willingness to drive over the speed limit was the importance of ‘not wanting to break the law’ influencing decisions on driving speeds. The results confirm the need to establish stronger social norms against speeding, learning from experience particularly in the area of drink driving in which the behaviour is strongly seen as socially undesirable. The results also show that risk taking is associated with less support for countermeasures, as might be expected.

Segmentation of drivers

Dividing the population of drivers into groups based on their attitudes and behaviour provides a better understanding of the area for developing and targeting communications. The segmentation was conducted separately on male and female drivers, as there are substantial differences between male and female driver involvement in crashes as speeding drivers.

There were some similarities between the male and female groups: including a socially responsible, low risk group; and groups with increasing levels of risk taking. There were differences, however, particularly in the profile of the highest risk groups in each gender.

Highest Risk Males The male segment with the greatest reported willingness to speed represents the main target group. This group:

- had a much higher proportion of younger drivers than the other segments (in both the 17-29 and 30-39 years age groups),
- had the least internalised norms that speeding is wrong,
- had the lowest agreement with enforcement countermeasures, and
- had the highest incidence of being booked recently for speeding.

Interestingly, this group had a relatively high involvement in anti-speeding advertising ('ads are aimed at drivers like me', 'situations in the ads could happen to me'). This indicates both good targeting of advertising to younger drivers and at least some awareness of speed as a problem by this target group.

Higher Risk Females: In contrast, the highest risk female segment, while not as extreme in risk taking as the corresponding male group, had similar attitudes towards speeding and enforcement. However, this segment:

- _ had a broader age distribution, and
- _ reported being much less involved in anti-speeding advertising.

This may be partly related to the different age profile, but also possibly because the focus in anti-speeding advertising is on male drivers.

Secondary Risk Males: A second male segment had:

- _ a high proportion of drivers aged 50 years and over, and
- _ had a similar low involvement in advertising to that of the female risk group.

This finding suggests that campaigns to encompass female and older drivers may need separate creative material developed more specifically for these groups.

Conclusions

The survey shows continuing high acceptance of speeding as the main cause of casualty crashes. There also continues to be substantial support for general countermeasures to reduce speeding, particularly general police enforcement.

Increasing the level of advertising campaigns and increasing the use of fixed speed cameras, meet with less support though it is still relatively high. Countermeasures that will impact more intrusively on drivers meet with the least support.

Support for more innovative countermeasures (of those presented in the survey) which have not yet had the benefit of being subject to public discussion and promotion was also relatively good: changing speed limits to meet driving conditions, speed limiting of cars, and higher penalties for young drivers.

A key attitude to address is 'not wanting to break the law' as a motivator for driving speed. The cues and situations that lead drivers to speed — such as being in a hurry, the risk of detection, the 'roll on' effect of the speed of other drivers, and light traffic — must also be taken into account in understanding the decision making process.

There is a need to establish stronger social norms against speeding, learning from experience especially in the area of drink driving in which the behaviour is strongly seen as socially undesirable.