



Safer Driving Agreements in the Australian Context: Can They be Effective?

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Overview

- The young driver problem
- What are safer driving agreements?
- Methodology
- Research findings
- Conclusions



The Young Driver Problem

The Young Driver Problem [1]

- Young novice drivers over-represented in crash risk
- Risk is highest during the first 6-12 months of Provisional licence phase
- Risk is lowest during the Learner licence phase
- Interventions to improve novice driver safety are critical

(McCartt, Shabanova & Leaf, 2003)

The Young Driver Problem [2]

- Parents pivotal in modelling and shaping the driving behaviour of their children
 - Provide most of the driving supervision and instruction during the Learner licence period
 - General parental monitoring found to be associated with lower rates of youth risk taking
- Parents may be unaware of the important role that they play

(Simons-Morton et al., 2008; Scott-Parker et al., 2011; DeVore & Ginsburg, 2005; Beck et al., 2002)

The Young Driver Problem [3]

- Many parents report having rules and expectations about independent driving
- Often considerable disagreement between parents and young drivers regarding the nature of these rules and expectations
 - Particularly when parents are not consistent in the regulation and enforcement of these rules

(Beck et al., 2005; Hartos et al., 2004)



Safer Driving Agreements

What are Safe Driving Agreements?

- Safer Driving Agreements (SDAs) are:
 - A formal statement of driving conditions, restrictions and responsibilities
 - Ratified by a young novice driver and another party or parties
 - Aimed at enhancing or promoting safe driving by helping both parties to communicate and reach agreement on rules and expectations and to discuss safe driving

Who is Involved in an SDA?

- Can involve a number of interested parties:
 - Parents/Grandparents
 - Supervising driver
 - Peers/Schools
 - Employers
 - Government licensing authorities/Police
 - Insurance companies

Common Characteristics of SDAs

- Commit parents to support the young driver (e.g., providing sufficient supervised driving in relevant situations)
- Commit young drivers to comply with certain restrictions (e.g., Graduated Driver Licensing [GDL] restrictions, etc)
- Stipulates how behaviour will be monitored, and any rewards and consequences associated with particular behaviours

SDAs in Australia

- A number of SDAs currently in Australia
 - Roads 2 Survival
 - Going Solo
 - Remediation program (SA)
- One process evaluation showed *Going Solo* increased discussion about road safety and risks, and significant improvements in attitudes toward risky driving
- No outcome evaluations conducted to date

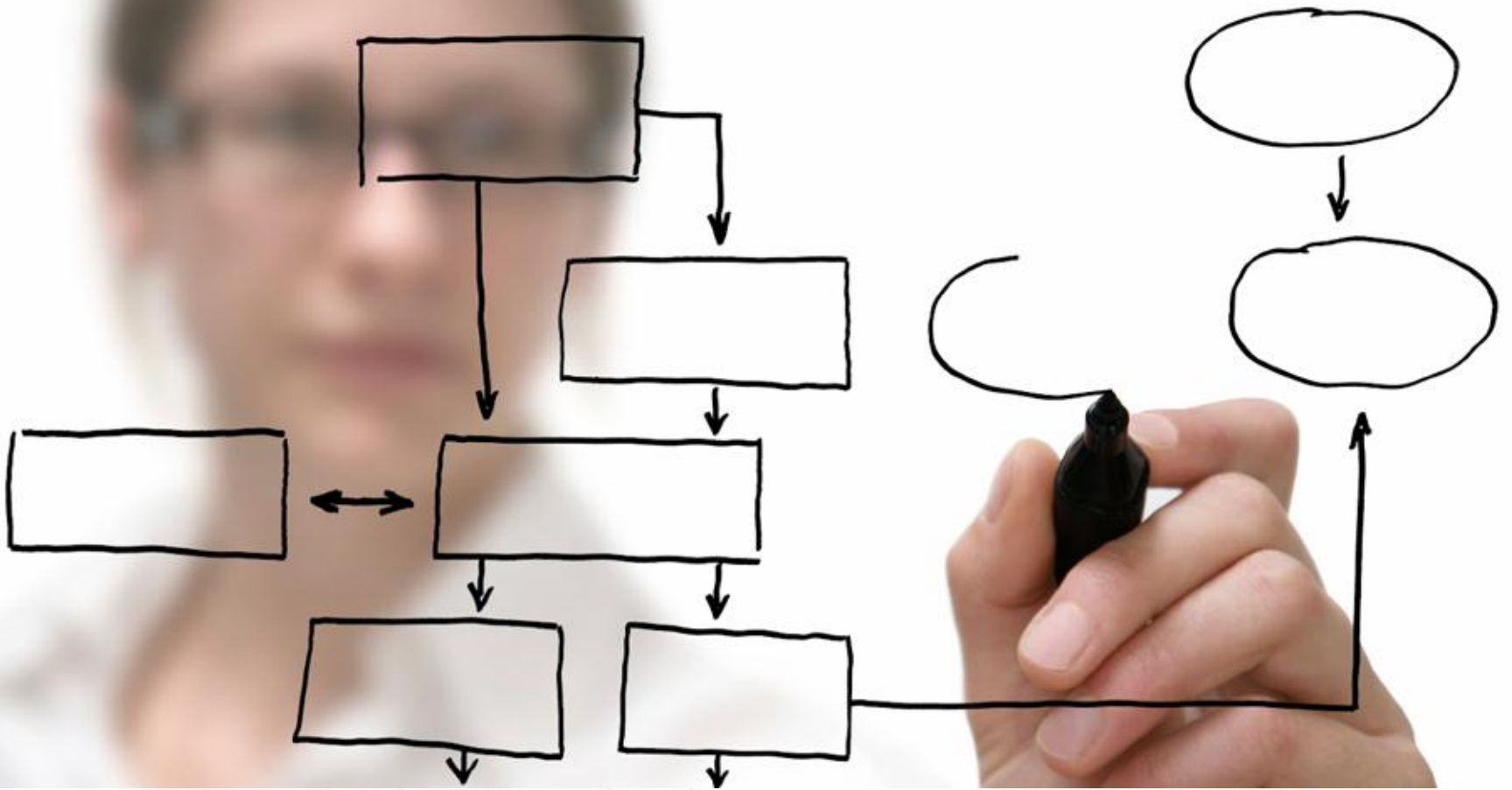
SDAs Overseas

- Extensive use and evaluation in the US:
 - Checkpoints program (SDA as a key component)
- Results suggest:
 - Increased discussion about road safety and risks
 - Increased restrictions and rules by parents
 - Only modest reductions in offence rates, and inconsistent changes in crash-involvement
 - Issues with suboptimal uptake and discordance regarding the agreements

What Does The Research Tell Us?

- SDAs can help educate parents and young drivers about risks and motivate parents to set greater restrictions on driving
- The impact on offence rates and crash involvement remains uncertain
- SDAs may typically only be adopted by families who are among the most safety conscious from the outset

(Hartos et al., 2004; Simons-Morton et al., 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006)



Research Methodology

Methodology

- Four separate consultation phases:
 - Expert panel with key researchers and program developers from the United States ($n = 4$)
 - Australian stakeholders ($n = 22$)
 - Included transport authorities, motoring groups, police agencies, driver trainer organisations, program providers)
 - Young driver focus groups/interviews ($n = 15$)
 - Parent focus group/survey ($n = 8$)



Research Findings

General Perceptions of SDAs

- Innovative approach in theory but maybe not in practice
- Complementary to existing rules and regulations (e.g., GDL)
- Support for introduction contingent on a successful trial and evaluation
- Acknowledgement of scarce empirical evidence for effectiveness in reducing offence rates or crash involvement
- Effectiveness may be limited to those who are already safety conscious and those with strong parent/child relationships
- Effectiveness likely to be limited to increasing discussion of road safety and safe driving

Partners in SDAs

- Parents/caregiver most common choice
 - Direct and vested involvement
 - Previous research highlights benefits of greater parental involvement
 - Must consider family dynamics (e.g., parenting styles and key factors of parent/child relationship)
- Other options that received some support:
 - Collective peer agreements (with parents; reduce stigma and increase participation rates)
 - Employers/workplaces (particularly with more independent young drivers)

Optimal Time for Implementation

- Must cover the early years of independent driving due to high crash risk
- Few schools of thought:
 - First implemented in Provisional phase
 - First implemented in pre-licence/Learner phase to normalise the process
- Scope to integrate SDAs into existing GDL processes? Or do we risk overloading young drivers?

Conditions

- Conditions should focus on illegal and unsafe driving behaviours and complying with licence restrictions
- Young drivers strongly opposed to conditions being more stringent than existing regulations
- Parental responsibilities seen as important
 - Support, treating the young driver like an adult, modelling appropriate driving behaviours, providing access to a safe vehicle/supervision
- Development of the conditions should involve the young driver, be tailor-made and flexible

Rewards & Consequences

- Mixed perceptions of rewards and consequences
 - Punitive consequences perceived as more important than rewards (to give SDAs “teeth”)
 - Consequences should be vehicle/driving related (e.g., removal or restriction of driving privileges)
 - Not a strong indication that financial incentives would encourage greater rates of participation

Barriers & Solutions

- Low likelihood of honest self-reporting (particularly if rewards and consequences are involved)
- Invasive in-vehicle technology (e.g., cameras, GPS trackers) not supported; less invasive (e.g., speed monitoring) devices somewhat supported
- Young drivers unlikely to volunteer (restriction on freedom and independence)
- Difficult to engage young people who are more independent (e.g., live out of home, have their own vehicle)
- Power imbalance – lack of ability for young drivers to sanction parents if they fail to meet their responsibilities
- Parents are often time poor – impact on participation



Conclusions

Conclusions

- Limited evidence to base recommendations for best-practice
- SDAs may be effective in increasing discussion about safe driving and driving restrictions
- Only modest evidence they reduce risk taking behaviour, traffic offences or crashes
- At best, SDAs appear to be a complementary approach to improving young driver safety, rather than a prominent strategy
- Further development and evaluation recommended prior to any widespread implementation



Questions?

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