

Aggressive Driving on Australian Roads

Amanda N. Stephens, Michael Fitzharris

Monash University Accident Research Centre, Monash University, Victoria Australia

Abstract

A national study was conducted to understand the prevalence of driver aggression, the type of drivers who are likely to exhibit aggressive behaviour, and whether this is emblematic of a broader pattern of dangerous driving behaviour. The majority of drivers reported some form of aggressive driving, with age and gender differences apparent. Young male drivers (aged 22-39) reported the most extreme aggression, with 36% having chased another driver when angry at least once. Aggressive driving was associated with drink-driving, speeding, and the use of a hand-held phone, suggesting it may be part of a larger suite of problem behaviours.

Background

Anecdotally, aggressive driving appears to be common in Australia. However current data on the prevalence and nature of this is lacking. A national study conducted in 2004 showed that 93% of those surveyed (N=1,880) had been subjected to aggression from other motorists during their driving lifetime, while 43% had perpetrated aggressive driving in retaliation to the behaviour of others (AAMI, 2004).

As aggressive driving has been linked to increased crash risk (American Automobile Association, 2009), targeting the reduction of these behaviours is imperative to improving road safety. For this reason it is important to understand who demonstrates aggressive behaviour, as well as the frequency and nature of these behaviours. Extrapolating from international studies, it is likely that aggressive driving is a common behaviour exhibited by mainly younger drivers (Paleti, Eluru, & Bhat, 2010; Roberts & Indermaur, 2005), and may form part of a larger suite of problematic driving behaviours (Vanlaar, Simpson, Mayhew, & Robertson, 2008). The aim of the study was to explore self-reported aggressive driving in a large Australian sample, and to investigate associations with other dangerous behaviours including speeding, drink-driving and illegal mobile phone use while driving.

Method

A large cross-sectional survey was conducted over two phases, inviting drivers from all Australian jurisdictions to participate. Participants were asked to report the frequency over the previous two-year period (1=never, 6= almost always, later recoded into “never”, “very infrequently”, “occasionally” and “frequently”) of aggressive driving behaviours, such as sounding the horn when angry, chasing another driver when angry, tailgating and expressing anger any way possible. Data on speeding, drink-driving, mobile phone usage while driving and crash history were also obtained.

Results

The final sample contained 2,916 drivers (males=45%; average age=42 ±16 years). Aggressive behaviours such as expressing annoyance to other drivers and sounding the horn in anger were reported by the majority of the sample (60% and 70% respectively). More extreme behaviour such as chasing another driver when angry was less common, however still reported by 18% of the overall sample.

Aggressive driving behaviours were more common in younger, male drivers (see Figure 1) with 36% of drivers aged 22 to 39 reporting extreme aggression. Associations were found between crash involvement and aggression with 96% of drivers involved in a crash also reporting aggressive

behaviour. When compared to non-aggressive drivers, aggressive drivers were also more likely to report using a hand-held mobile phone while driving (18.3% cf. 5.2%), drink-driving (8.6% cf 3.7%) and speeding (60.4% cf 32.9%).

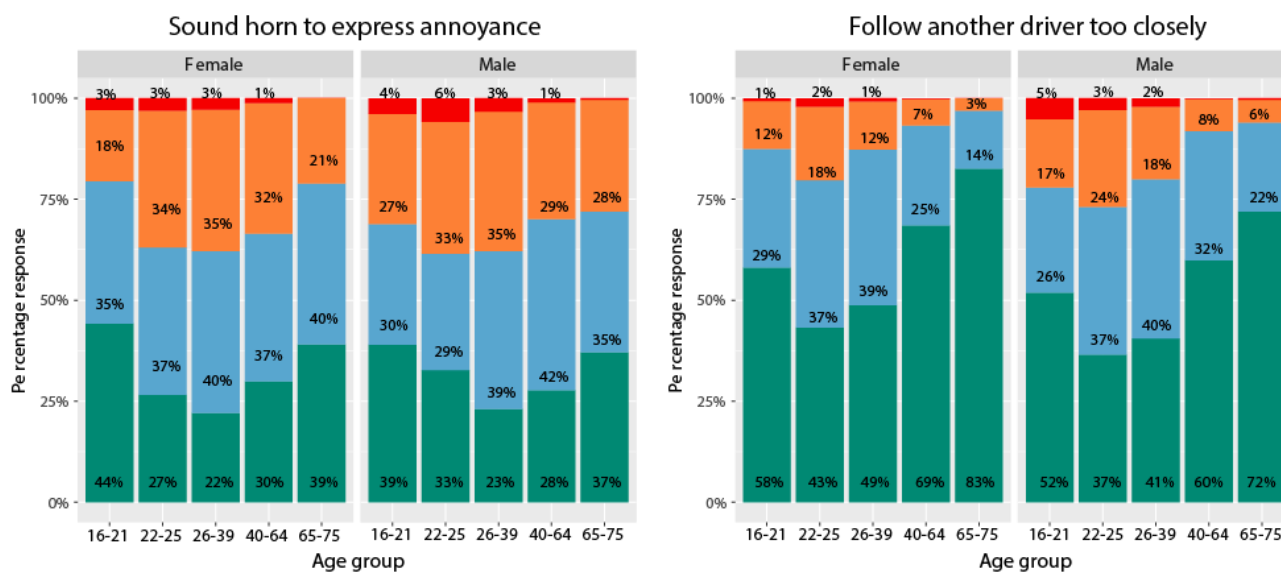
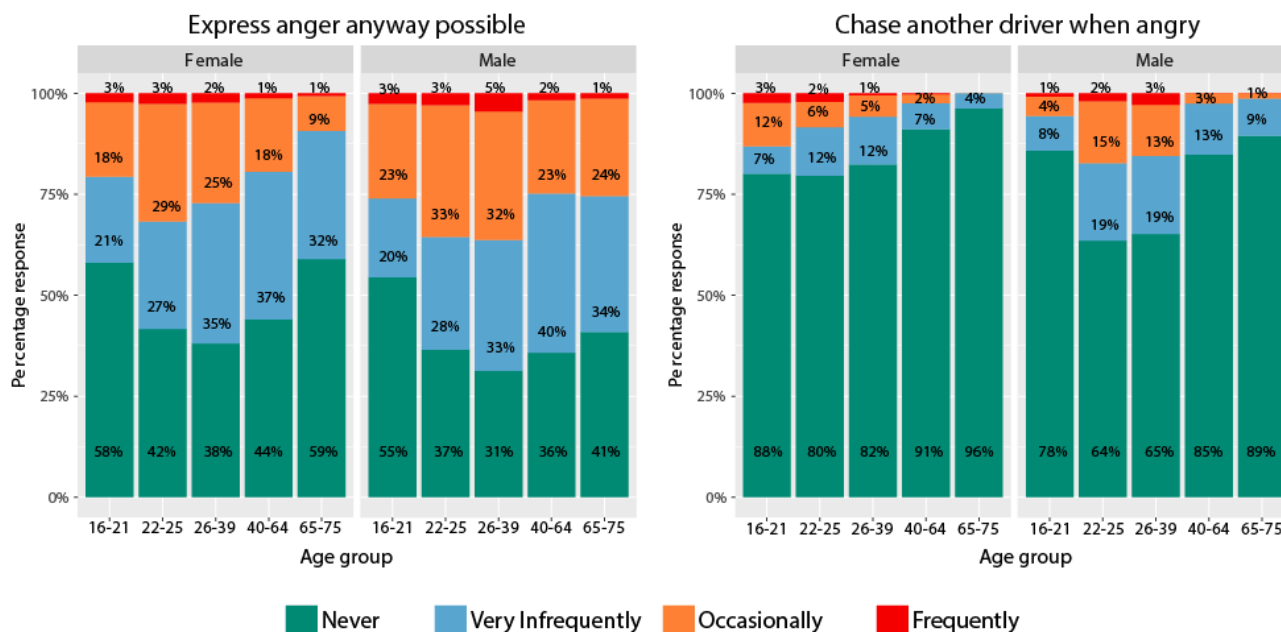


Figure 1. Gender, age and aggressive driving frequency

Conclusions

The findings highlight that aggressive driving in Australia is prevalent and forms part of a broader pattern of dangerous driving behaviour. Aggressive driving appears to be widespread and related to other dangerous behaviours, including speeding, drink-driving and the use of a hand-held phone while driving. Therefore, targeting the social acceptability of these behaviours and the perceived enforcement for failure to comply with road safety rules may prove to be an effective intervention. More research is needed to understand where aggressive driving fits within an overall risky driving pattern of behaviour, what attitudes drivers hold toward aggressive driving and how to target the reduction of these.

References

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