

## **Characteristics of offenders attending a Traffic Offender Intervention Program in New South Wales, Australia**

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### **Abstract**

In 2008, when the NSW Traffic Offender Intervention Program commenced, seven in ten offenders enrolled in the Blacktown Traffic Offenders Program (Blacktown TOP) were drink drivers. By 2015, this proportion had reduced to five in ten of unrestricted driver offenders, and three in ten novice driver offenders. Five in ten novice driver offenders attending Blacktown TOP in 2015 were appealing a driver licence suspension following speeding offences. Offences for non-compliance with traffic signals/ signs and GDLS restrictions were also frequent. This paper considers the future of the Traffic Offender Intervention Program in light of these changes in the offender population.

### **Background**

Whether through intended illegality or through errors and misunderstanding, drivers who have committed offences are subject to punishments such as fines and licence sanctions. Drivers may need to complete an education course before they are able to continue or resume driving. In NSW, the Traffic Offender Intervention Program (TOIP) is an elective program targeting driving offenders (Henson, 2010) that commenced in 2008 and is used by Local Courts as a pre-sentencing option for driving offenders.

This paper reports the characteristics of offenders who were enrolled in the Blacktown Traffic Offenders Program (Blacktown TOP) located in western metropolitan Sydney over 2008-2015, and then provides a more detailed description of the characteristics of the 2015 offender cohort.

### **Method**

Copies of annual summary reports by Blacktown TOP were obtained for the period 2008-2015, inclusive. These reports were based on enrolment records for 6,031 offenders, and provide information of offender characteristics (gender, age, offences). De-identified driver offender records relating to the enrolment of 429 offenders during 2015 were also obtained from Blacktown TOP.

### **Results and Conclusions**

#### *Generally*

Offenders who enrol in Blacktown TOP are overwhelmingly male (80%), with a slight trend towards more women enrolling over the period 2008-2015. Almost all offenders are under 50 years of age, with more-or-less equal numbers of offenders being aged under 25 years and 25-49 years.

Drink driving offenders comprised 68% of the offenders who were enrolled in 2008, but this proportion had fallen to 33% by 2015. Offenders who were charged with dangerous and negligent

driving similarly fell from 13.0% of offenders enrolled in 2009 to 4.5% of the enrolments in 2015. Conversely, speeding offender enrolments increased from 8.4% in 2008 to 40% of all enrolments during 2015. The percentage of drug driving offenders enrolled remained more-or-less constant at 3-4% over the 2008-2015 period. Offences associated with non-compliance with graduated driver licensing system (GDLS) requirements – typically novice drivers not displaying L-plates or P-plates – rose from 4.0% in 2008 to 14% in 2015.

#### *Novice drivers*

The percentages of each licence class of offenders who enrolled and attended Blacktown TOP in 2015 are given in Table 1(a). In 2015, almost two-thirds (63.6%) were novice drivers, that is, they held a NSW learner, P1 provisional, or P2 provisional driver licence.

**Table 1. Offenders attending Blacktown TOP in 2015**

**(a) Licence class of traffic offenders (%)**

<b>Driver licence type</b>	<b>%</b>
Learner	5.6%
P1 provisional	19.3%
P2 provisional	38.7%
Unrestricted	35.9%
Never licensed	0.5%

**(b) Principal offences (%)**

<b>Traffic offenders with a novice driver licence (L, P1 or P2)</b>		<b>Traffic offenders with an unrestricted driver licence</b>	
Speeding	50.2 %	Speeding	27.3%
Drink driving	24.2%	Drink driving	54.5%
Driving unlicensed	11.0%	Driving unlicensed	9.7%
Disobey traffic signals/signs	5.1%	Disobey traffic signals/signs	1.3%
Not comply GDLS conditions	3.7%	Not comply GDLS conditions	NA
Use mobile phone	1.1%	Use mobile phone	0.0%
Drug driving	0.7%	Drug driving	3.9%
Other road transport offences	2.6%	Other road transport offences	3.2%
Not stated	1.5%	Not stated	0.0%

The principal – or most serious – offences of these novice drivers are shown in Table 1(b) (after Corbett, 2010). Speeding is the most common offence (50.2% of novice driver offenders). Drink driving (24.2%) and driving unlicensed (11.0%) were also frequent offences. For unrestricted drivers, drink driving is most common (54.5%), followed by speeding (27.3%) and unlicensed driving (9.7%). While proportions differ, these are the three most common offences of both groups of offenders.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

NSW uses a “one-size-fits-all” TOIP model for all traffic offenders. This may not be the best option. There is a need to explore alternative ways to allow for the provision of better targeted course content to address the specific risks faced by different types of offenders, their individual needs for education and offender rehabilitation, and to ensure that they are each responsive to the safety messages provided.

## **References**

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