

# Aggressive driving



- Recently, there has been growing concern among ordinary drivers that aggressive driving is increasing on our roads.<sup>1-4</sup>
- Aggressive drivers are more likely to be involved in crashes,<sup>5,6</sup> be young men, have high frustration levels and a low regard for others, be competitive in nature, and tend to speed, drive impaired by alcohol and/or drugs and engage in other unsafe practices such as unlicensed driving and driving without a seatbelt.

## State of the Road A Fact Sheet of the Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland (CARRS-Q)

### THE FACTS

#### What is it?

While not everyone agrees about how aggressive driving should be defined, it is normally taken to include such behaviours as:

#### Minor:

- Shouting abuse
- Making obscene gestures
- Flicking lights on and off to get other drivers to move out of the way
- Deliberately braking or slowing suddenly to irritate or impede others
- Giving a prolonged blast of the horn deliberately
- Driving too closely behind another vehicle (tailgating)

#### Severe:

- Pursuing another vehicle
- Deliberately swerving in front of another vehicle
- Trying to run another vehicle off the road
- Attempting to stop another vehicle
- Deliberately bumping another vehicle
- Getting out and approaching another road user
- Damaging or attempting to damage a vehicle
- Assaulting or attempting to assault another road user (ie. pedestrians, cyclists and other drivers).

#### What do we know about it?

- Recently, in an effort to design countermeasures to address the underlying causes and motives for aggressive driving behaviours, researchers have been trying to distinguish between deliberate aggression and unintentional

errors. These two sources may result in apparently similar driving acts, or have a similar negative impact on others, but because the motives underlying them are different, the sorts of countermeasures to deal with them are likely to be different.

- Research has helped us understand that:
  - Aggressive driving is linked with high levels of driving anger and/or general hostility.<sup>6,7</sup>
  - Aggressive drivers may also suffer from disorders such as conduct disorder, ADHD or intermittent explosive disorder.<sup>7,8</sup>
  - Many ordinary drivers feel justified in 'sending a message' about another's driving and do this using behaviours that are aggressive.<sup>10</sup>
  - When a driver perceives another driver's actions to be deliberately intended to cause irritation or inconvenience, he/she is more likely to respond aggressively.<sup>11</sup>
  - Aggressive driving varies in degree across cultures and is likely to differentially impact on cyclists and pedestrians.

#### What causes it?

- The causes of aggressive driving are complex.<sup>6</sup>
- Drivers who are inclined to be more aggressive in their everyday (non-driving) lives are also more likely to be aggressive when driving. Similarly, people who feel angry on-road are also more likely to express this through aggressive driving behaviours.
- Aggressive road user behaviour may also be the result of the driver's frustration at being unable to progress unimpeded by traffic.

- Frustration can also be provoked by an individual's life events, emotional state or high stress levels. Some psychiatrists point to deep-rooted personal causes such as stress disorders or antisocial personality disorder<sup>7,8</sup> that lead to impaired judgment. Social scientists have tended to see a connection between societal problems and uncivil or violent forms of driving behaviour.

#### Road rage

'Road rage' is not the same as aggressive driving. It is a term used to describe violence associated with motor vehicle use and refers only to the most severe form of driving aggression (i.e. assault/attempted assault). Though incidents of this type are severe, fortunately they are also uncommon. Surveys of drivers consistently show that only between 2 and 5% of drivers report being assaulted or attacked by another driver.<sup>4,12</sup>

## Don't get into your car angry, upset, aggressive or distracted.

#### Penalties for aggressive driving

If you or another driver are driving aggressively, the offending vehicle's registration number can be passed to the police along with an official report. Aggressive driving penalties may include a fine, loss of demerit points or licence disqualification. Assault, "reckless driving" and "intentionally causing serious injury" are criminal offences and serious incidents may involve a jail term.

## TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE

### To reduce your own aggressive driving:

- Remember that getting angry at someone may make you feel worse than you do already.
- Don't get into your car in an emotional state (angry, upset, aggressive, distracted) that may affect your driving or patience with other people.
- Remember that it is not someone else's fault that you are running late.
- Consider how you may feel after you calm down.
- Be aware of the consequences for the person you harass. They may feel upset, frightened, and unsure about driving alone. There may even be small children in the car who do not understand what is going on.

### To avoid becoming a victim:

- If you're being hassled by another driver, try not to react. Avoid making eye contact and do not accelerate, brake, or swerve suddenly.
- If a driver continues to hassle you or you think you are being followed, lock your door and drive on to the nearest police station or busy place for help.
- When stopped in traffic, leave enough space to pull out from behind the car you are following.
- If someone tries to get into your car, attract attention with your horn.
- Do not be tempted to start a fight and do not be tempted to carry any sort of weapon. It may only provoke a potential assailant and could end up in his or her hands.



## CARRS-Q'S WORK IN THIS AREA

CARRS-Q has an active research program examining aggressive driving, including:

- Reducing aggression on our roads: Testing a comprehensive model of aggressive driving - This project explores the cognitive and emotional processes involved in driving aggression and seeks to refine a model of driving aggression. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council.
- Developing and testing a comprehensive model of aggressive driving. This project also examines triggers for aggressive driving, thoughts and emotions experienced during aggressive driving incidents and driver aggressive responses to on- road events. The research tests the model using ordinary drivers and the CARRS-Q advanced driving simulator.
- Driver etiquette: An exploration of how drivers think about the informal 'rules' or expectations associated with everyday driving. This project uses focus group

discussions to begin to define the informal rules of driving courtesy.

CARRS-Q's Aggressive Driving research publications can be accessed at QUT ePrints (<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/>) by searching 'aggressive driving'.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Further research on the contexts for aggressive or risky driving and effective enforcement countermeasures.
- The development of an effective public education campaign.
- The development of a driver education intervention for repeat aggressive drivers.
- Road engineering improvements to reduce driver frustration and improve victim safety.
- The development of intelligent transport systems applications.

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