

Young drivers who take risks on the road have a greater risk of mental health problems

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Young adults who take risks when driving are more likely to experience psychological distress, including mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, reveals research published ahead of print in *Injury Prevention*.

Young drivers have more accidents and are more likely to be involved in a crash in which someone dies than older drivers, and [risky behaviour](#) is known to contribute to crashes involving young novice drivers.

[Psychological distress](#), such as depression and anxiety, has been linked to risky behaviour in adolescents, including unprotected sex, smoking and high [alcohol consumption](#). Australian researchers therefore set out to find if there was a similar link between psychological distress and risk taking in young drivers, such as speeding, not wearing a seat belt and using a mobile phone while at the wheel.

Researchers in Queensland, Australia asked 761 young novice drivers to fill out an online questionnaire to assess their psychological distress and their driving behaviour. The novice drivers were aged 17-25 years and had a provisional (intermediate) driver's licence which enabled them to drive unaccompanied.

Psychological distress alone was found to account for 8.5% of the increased risky driving behaviour of young adults. The association was greater in women than in men; 9.5% of the variance in risky driving could be explained by psychological distress in women compared with

6.7% in men.

The authors suggest that similar questionnaires could be used to identify young drivers most at risk of psychological distress and therefore a greater accident risk on the road through risky driving behaviour.

"Young people presenting to medical and mental health professionals could be screened for current psychological distress, particularly if they have incurred injury through risky behaviour," they say.

These drivers could be targeted with specific road safety countermeasures and efforts made to improve their mental wellbeing by monitoring them for signs of depression and anxiety.

Provided by British Medical Journal

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