

Attitudes to speed among learner drivers predict unsafe driving once qualified

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Attitudes to speed and risk-taking on the road develop at the learner driver stage and predict those who will go on to be potentially dangerous drivers once fully licensed, indicates research published online in *Injury Prevention*.

More effort should therefore be channelled into nipping these [attitudes](#) in the bud to enhance [road safety](#), rather than just focusing on technical competence at this stage, say the authors.

In 2010, 1850 people died on the UK's roads and a further 22,690 people were seriously injured. Young male drivers feature prominently, the figures show.

The authors wanted to know when risky [driving](#) attitudes develop and if these were linked to subsequent driving behaviour.

They therefore based their findings on responses from participants in the Genesis 12-19 (G1219) study, which includes sibling pairs and a randomly selected sample of twins born between 1985 and 1988.

This ongoing study is looking at the impact of [genes](#) and [environmental factors](#) on [adolescent development](#).

Some 1596 participants aged between 14 and 23 were asked their views about risky driving and driver behaviours, using validated scales in 2004 and then again in 2007 (1556 responses obtained; age range 18 to 27).

In 2004, less than one in five (18%) were fully qualified drivers; in 2007 almost two thirds (64%) had a full driving licence.

The responses showed that attitudes became riskier the more training and/or [driving experience](#) was acquired between these two time points.

Fully qualified drivers were more likely to endorse risky driving behaviours than either non-drivers or learner drivers in 2004. Riskier attitudes were associated with having held a full licence for longer, having clocked up more driving miles, and having committed more speeding violations.

By 2007, attitudes had become riskier among those who had passed their [driving test](#) since 2004, but there was no change in attitude among those who either still didn't drive or who were learning to drive at this point.

"One possibility is that confidence in the ability to handle speed and experience of the relatively forgiving nature of the road environment makes drivers feel that speeding is less risky than they thought initially," suggest the authors.

Furthermore, the attitudes to speeding among fully qualified and learner drivers in 2004 significantly predicted actual speeding behaviours by 2007.

The high costs of risk-taking among young drivers require a more stringent approach to prevention, say the authors, who suggest a range of measures, including tougher penalties for violations and graduated licensing programmes to cut the amount of unsupervised driving immediately after getting a full license.

The learner driver stage would also be the most productive point at which to start hammering home the safety culture, because it marks the

start of a change in attitude to speeding, they emphasise.

They conclude: "It is possible that most UK training is focused on the control and higher order driving skills that will be formally assessed at the expense of developing safer driving attitudes. A focus on skills may contribute to the development of riskier attitudes as training control skills can lead to overconfidence."

More information: The development of risky attitudes from pre-driving to fully qualified driving, Online First, [doi 10.1136/injuryprev-2012-040551](https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2012-040551)

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