

# Survey finds anxious drivers rule on NZ roads

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Two thirds of New Zealand drivers experience mild to severe anxiety when they are behind the wheel – with fear of road rage from others among the causes, a Massey University study has found.

Dr. Joanne Taylor, a specialist in driver behaviour based in the School of Psychology, says hers is the first study of driver anxiety among the general population. Of the 441 people who responded to a survey sent to a random sample of 1500 adults registered to vote, 52 per cent reported mild anxiety and 16 per cent felt moderate to severe driving anxiety. Just under a third – 31 per cent – said they experienced no driving anxiety.

The study: The extent and characteristics of driver anxiety, has just been published in the Transportation Research online journal.

Dr. Taylor says she is surprised at the reportedly high level of driving anxiety in New Zealand that her survey exposes. The clinical psychologist is also concerned at finding that few people seek help in overcoming it – as driving anxiety can have a major impact on people's lives, preventing people from being able to drive to work or visit whanau and other activities.

Anxiety can also lead to exaggerated safety behaviour – such as slow driving and uncertainty when changing lanes – which may create further dangers on the road.

Participants, aged 18 to 87, were asked about their driving histories, including when and how they learnt to drive; how far they drove each week and whether they were currently driving. They were also asked to rate their [anxiety levels](#) about being on the receiving end of road rage, and their feelings of safety when driving.

Having a car crash and dying, and concerns about the safety of other people's driving ability were the greatest fears of those who considered themselves to be anxious [drivers](#), according to a previous study. Those who learned to drive later in life were also more prone to experiencing driver anxiety. Dr. Taylor also stresses that driving anxiety and fear are not solely the domain of "post-crash psychological phenomena".

Anxiety about driving is "very treatable" and she would like to see more availability of online self-help programmes to address this, Dr. Taylor says. She suspects most people do not seek help to deal with driving anxiety because of the same stigma and discrimination feared by those with mental distress.

Of those participating in the survey, most (88 per cent) were of European descent and five per cent were Māori. There were 51 per cent of the sample who had a post-secondary or tertiary qualification, and 44 per cent were men.

Dr. Taylor, whose Ph.D. (2002) was on Understanding driving-related fear, has been researching the psychology of driving behaviour for a number of years. As well as conducting studies and surveys on driving behaviour, including driving anxiety, she is also interested in issues such as driving anger.

Her research programme has advanced understandings of the prevalence of driving anxiety and has "expanded awareness that driving [anxiety](#) is a complex phenomenon that is not confined to the post-motor vehicle accident experience".

**More information:** Joanne E. Taylor. The extent and characteristics of driving anxiety, *Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.trf.2018.05.031](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trf.2018.05.031)

Provided by Massey University

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