Understanding the Driving and Licensing Experiences of Youth with Autism
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Why do this research?
Throughout the motorised world, young drivers remain overrepresented in road crashes, and in fatalities and injuries arising from road crashes. Risks associated with young drivers can be further increased for young drivers with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as these individuals may have difficulties in problem solving, organisational skills, conceptual development, inferences and judgement, and attention and impulse control. These skills are fundamental for safe driving behaviour.

The aim of this study was to understand the driving and licensing experiences of youth with an ASD, and the barriers associated with licensure.

What did we do?
We analysed the posted comments written by 117 participants from three groups (101 Individuals with ASD, 7 Relations, and 9 relevant to persons with/related to/friends of individuals with ASD) in five online discussion forums.

What did we find?
Differences and similarities regarding barriers experienced by individuals and/or drivers with ASD were found between each group. To illustrate, while all three groups recognised the difficulties in licensure for Individuals with ASD, Individuals with ASD appeared to focus on the logistics of licensure (e.g., driving lessons, driving tests) and crashes; Relations focused on their relationship to the Individual with ASD, and the ASD characteristics of the Individual; and Unknowns focused on reasons for licensure.

What does it mean?
Individuals with ASD, and their support network including family and friends, need to understand that everyone has a different perspective regarding not only getting a driver’s licence, but driving more generally. Parents and friends can help improve the road safety of their teen with an ASD by helping them to understand and remember that driving isn’t just operating a vehicle, following road rules, and passing a test; rather driving is a highly complex and dynamic behaviour that can have great potential for harm to the young driver and anyone with whom they share the road.