Understanding the psychosocial factors influencing the risky behaviour of young drivers
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Why do this research?
We know young drivers are overrepresented in car crashes. Research usually investigates the relationship between behaviours like crashes and finite measures such as age or gender.

We know young drivers are also developing psychosocially, so we wanted to find the relationship between psychosocial factors (including psychological factors such as sensation seeking) and social factors (such as parents and friends), and determine how it actually influences their driving behaviour.

What did we do?
First of all, we ran a pilot study to confirm that we were asking appropriate questions with appropriate terminology. Then we ran a paper survey with 165 young drivers aged 17 to 24 years in south-east Queensland.

What did we find?
We found that that the combination of age, gender, and the amount of time the driver spent on the road could explain some of their risky driving behaviour. We also found that personal propensity for thrill seeking (e.g., enjoying themselves while they were driving on the road), was related to risky driving. Probably the most interesting finding in this case is that young drivers who imitated others who were risky drivers (e.g., parents and their friends), were also more likely to be risky drivers. Furthermore, young drivers who anticipated rewards – these could be things like getting to a destination more quickly or enjoying the drive more – also reported more risky behaviour on the road.

Young drivers who anticipated being punished for risky driving behaviour (e.g., social ostracism by their friends, or mum and dad punishing them for risky driving behaviour) reported engaging in less risky driving behaviour.

What does it mean?
It means that not only do we have to look at personal characteristics such as age, gender, sensation seeking propensity and how much time is spent actually driving on the road, we also need to consider the influence of Mum, Dad and friends, because these psychosocial influences can encourage risky behaviour. Importantly, they can also encourage safe driving behaviour, which is the goal of all road safety interventions.