

Adolescent Risk Research Unit

Rise, and shine.

The influence of sensitivity to reward and punishment, propensity for sensation seeking, depression and anxiety on the risky behaviour of novice drivers: A path model

Scott-Parker, B., Watson, B., King, M.J. & Hyde, M.K. (2012)

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Why do this research?

We know that young drivers are at increased risk of being injured or killed in a road crash, and that young drivers are still developing from children into young adults.

This research project explored the relationship between risky driving behaviour in young drivers and personal characteristics, including sensitivity to reward and punishment, sensation seeking propensity, and mental health including depression and anxiety.

What did we do?

761 young drivers aged 17 to 24 years who had a provisional drivers licence, from across the state of Queensland, Australia, completed an online survey.

What did we find?

Generally, young female drivers reported greater depression, anxiety, and punishment sensitivity, compared to young male drivers. Young male drivers reported greater sensitivity to rewards and greater sensation seeking propensity.

Young drivers who experienced more depression reported more risky driving behaviours. Young drivers with greater sensitivity to reward, and those with greater sensation seeking propensity, reported more risky driving behaviours.

Young female drivers who reported more anxiety also reported more risky driving behaviours.

What does it mean?

Mental health interventions that address anxiety and depression in youth may have unintended benefits through a reduction in risky driving behaviours. Interventions should also target the perceived rewards associated with risky driving behaviour, e.g., arriving at destinations more quickly (note also that rewards may also include avoiding punishment). Interventions should also consider the influence of thrill-seeking behaviours and how else young drivers could satisfy their developmentally-immature thrill-seeking propensity.