

## Accident risk and behavioural patterns of younger drivers

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Following the initial survey (FDN1), this project was intended to advance understanding of the problems of young and inexperienced drivers by observing driving techniques and survey attitudes of three age groups - 17-20, 21-25 and 31-40 - that may influence their approach to driving and affect the level of accident risk. It was conducted in three distinct stages - an evaluation of 439 drivers on a selected route, a diary of car journeys made by each driver, and an interview/questionnaire on their attitudes to driving. The study took two years to complete.

Its main findings included:

- driver errors committed by males fell with age whereas those committed by females remained fairly high across age. Steering, speeding, mirror and positioning errors were those most frequently committed;
- speeding comprised 90 per cent of all dangerous errors for all age and sex groups, with younger males making more errors than younger females;
- locations with the highest number of errors per driver per km were 30mph sections, in particular residential and shopping zones. This was also reflected in the dangerous error locations, where pedestrian crossings also scored highly;
- all groups considered themselves to be better at driving than they were assessed to be by the in-car observers, with 17-20 year-old males the least accurate in their assessments;
- 34 per cent of 17-20 year-old males were rated 'bad' on safety and seven per cent were rated 'good'; 11 per cent of 31-40 year-old males were rated 'bad' on safety and 29 per cent were rated 'good';
- males drove further per week than females; females drove more often;
- the 17-20 year-old group drove for more than 20 per cent of their time with friends; for the 31-40 year-old group this was five per cent;
- 17-25 year-olds made a higher proportion of journeys between 10.00pm and 4.00am than did 31-40 year-olds;
- journeys with more than two passengers were considered more risky by all groups except for 31-40 year-old females. Males aged 17-20 were the group whose driving behaviour was most affected by passengers;
- 15 per cent of men and seven per cent of women had driven illegally before obtaining a provisional licence;
- 54 per cent of drivers considered that their driving had deteriorated since passing the test; only 22 per cent considered it had improved;
- all groups believed that comfort, price and reliability were the most important qualities of a car, but price was most important when actually purchasing;
- joining motorways, roundabouts and right turns were considered the most dangerous road situations by all drivers;
- males aged 17-20 were three to five times more likely to have 'own fault' accidents per year than 31-40 year-olds. Convictions per driver per year were also higher for males than females, but fell significantly with age for males.

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