Promoting a more positive traffic safety culture in Australia: Lessons learnt and future directions

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What influences public perception of road safety problems?

What issues need to be discussed if we are to make significant progress in reducing road trauma?
Overview

• Traffic safety culture
• Successful changes in traffic safety culture
  – Drink driving
  – Seat belt use
• Behaviours still in need of attention
  – Speeding
  – Phone use when driving
• The role of the media

Historically

• Traditional strategies to reduce crashes:
  – Education
    • Driver training & mass media messages
  – Enforcement
    • Legislation, countermeasures & penalties
  – Engineering
    • Road & vehicle design to protect from adverse consequences
Traffic Safety Culture

• Various definitions
• More or less focus on individual/community
• A continuum
• Includes:
  – Beliefs about what behaviours are normal
  – Expectations associated with violations
  – Attitudes about behaviours

Traffic Safety Culture

• The perceptions people have about what behaviors are normal in their peer group/community and their expectations for how that group reacts to violations to these behavioural norms.

• Applies to behaviours that:
  • increase crash risk (e.g., drink driving),
  • are protective (e.g., wearing seatbelts),
  • and are related to acceptance or rejection of traffic safety interventions.
Traffic Safety Culture in Australia [1]

- Structure of government and institutional arrangements (e.g., Parliamentary committees)
- Less emphasis on private industry
- Willingness for government intervention
- Government support for evidence-based policies
- Preparedness of government to consult the community

- Norms-based public education (e.g., peer targeted messages such as designated drivers)

- Enforcement
- Engineering
- Road-user focused public education (e.g., awareness, reinforcing)

(Adapted from Ward et al., 2010)

Traffic Safety Culture in Australia [2]

- Under-utilized concept in the Australian context
- Why TSC has not gained traction in Australia is unclear
- May reflect:
  - Lack of robust theoretical model to guide TSC
  - Strong reliance on marketing-driven public education

(Adapted from Williams & Haworth, 2007)
Traffic Safety Culture in Australia [3]

- Australia often seen as having a more positive TSC compared to some countries (e.g., USA)  Why ?
- Public more accepting of govt. intervention
  - Community education/media campaigns during pre-legislation & pre-enforcement periods have been vital
- Govt. more willing to intervene
- Govt. adopts evidence-based approaches
- Better availability of funds
- But perhaps not as positive as some other countries (e.g., Sweden)

Sweden

- Vision Zero
- Share the Vision
  - Volvo: No fatalities in their cars by 2020
- Speed limits
  - Our strongest tool
  - Must relate to body’s ability to survive if hit
- Is it ok to save a minute vs. is it ok if someone dies?
Sweden

- Help people not to speed via technology
- Help people not to drink and drive
  - Trucks used to supply goods for govt contracts must have Alcohol Interlock fitted
- Corporate responsibility
  - Post office van

Australian Success

- Large reductions in fatalities since 1970
- Many stakeholders involved
- Media:
  - Educating about risks (behaviour & enforcement)
  - Role in changing public perceptions
  - Chicken or egg?
    - Attitude or behaviour change, which comes 1st?
Drink driving

• Almost universal support in national attitudinal surveys of RBT for many years (Petroulias, 2011)

• Big changes in community attitudes towards & culture of drink driving in Australia

• Strong social disapproval:
  – 'Criminal'
  – 'Breaking the law'
  – Elliott, 1992

• Still a problem (~25% of fatalities) Australian Transport Council, 2011
Drink driving [2]

• Emergent challenges to consider
  – Increase in women being detected
  – Youth binge drinking
  – Drink driver/drink walker

• We must be ready to tackle these new challenges as well as work on traditional ones

Drink driving [3]

• Alcohol Ignition Interlocks
  – Currently used primarily for recidivists in Australia

• Opportunity to normalise their use
  – Fleet vehicles
  – All vehicles?

• Strengthen the community message that DD is never acceptable
Seat belt use

Compulsory Seat Belt Use [1]

- Substantial initial opposition in 1970s
- Traffic Accident Research Unit of NSW Dept. of Motor Transport, 1971 wrote:

> It is suggested that the fundamental source of public resistance is that motorists do not feel vulnerable to death or injury under normal driving conditions.

> This may prove to be an insurmountable barrier to public education designed to increase the seatbelt wearing rate.

McLean, 2012, p. 15
Compulsory Seat Belt Use [2]

• Turned out NOT to be an ‘insurmountable barrier’
• Sustained high levels of restraint use in Australia

?  

• Has the Australian public grasped the link between:
  – non-restraint use and risk of injury/death?
  – alcohol use and risk of crashing/injury/death?

Speeding

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Insurmountable Barrier?

It is suggested that the fundamental source of public resistance is that motorists do not feel vulnerable to death or injury under normal driving conditions.

This may prove to be an insurmountable barrier to public education designed to .................

Speeding

- Extensive enforcement & education, but remains prevalent
  - Implicated in 34% fatalities & 13% serious injuries
- Link between travel speed and crash outcome appears not to be widely accepted
- Deliberate disregard for speed limits by some
- Vocal minorities advocating for reduction of speed management strategies
- NT recent announcement
  - Trial of return to open speed limit on highways

Australian Transport Council, 2011; Fleiter, Lennon & Watson, 2007; Ipsos Social Research Institute, 2013
Mean speeds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speed Limit</th>
<th>New Zealand Mean speed</th>
<th>Queensland Mean speed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 km/hr (Rural)</td>
<td>95.6 km/hr</td>
<td>97.84 km/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 km/hr (Urban)</td>
<td>51.3 km/hr</td>
<td>56.76 km/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 km/hr (Rural)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>74.8 km/hr</td>
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<tr>
<td>50 km/hr Urban Mean Speed</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>46.19 km/hr</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: NZ Police Assistant Commissioner, 2013; Kloeden, 2012
% At or Below Speed Limit, Qld

We can help to change the conversation.....

Not everyone speeds!
Challenges for Speed Management [1]

• Not as simple as transferring what has worked for Drink driving/seat belt use
  – Speeding is transient
• Not a 1 size fits all approach
• Need to target motivations for speeding
• Counteract media glorification
• Counteract discrediting of enforcement
• New technology may assist
  – Point to point speed enforcement
  – ISA

Challenges for Speed Management [2]

• Mismatch between beliefs and behaviours
• Acceptance of tolerances
  – Reported belief that we should be able to drive:
    • 65 km+ in 60 km/hr zone (48%)
    • Up to 110 km in 100 km/hr zone (35%)
• Yet, speed identified most commonly as factor that contributes to crashes (54%)
• 70% - chance of being involved in a crash significantly increases if speed increases by 10 km/hr
Phone Use While Driving

Prevalence

- Hand held use illegal in all AU jurisdictions
- NSW:
  - 88% drivers reported making calls while driving
  - 68% reported sending sms
- Large differences in self-report vs observational studies
  - Deliberately concealing text messaging
Beliefs ≠ Behaviour

• Similar to speeding

• Misalignment between belief & behaviour
  – Extensive media attention/public outrage when crash/fatality involves phone-using driver
  – Calls for technology to block signal while driving

Enforcing Phone Use

• Difficult to enforce (concealment)

• Therefore, education campaigns may be particularly important to persuade drivers not to engage in this high risk behaviour

• Naturalistic driving studies may also provide important information for this purpose
  – Ability to show real consequences:
  – Near misses, loss of vehicle control
  – Collisions
Role of the Media

• Australia’s excellent progress since 1970
  – But who knows about it apart from us?

• Qld drivers surveyed about # fatalities
  – Majority under-estimated extent of deaths
  – Half reported less than half actual #

• Media may, in part, contribute to under-estimates
  – Some estimates based on small numbers heard in media during Christmas/Easter periods

Fleiter & Watson, 2012

Role of the Media

• May inadvertently give impression that these are the bulk of fatalities

• This misperception
  • Is likely to do little to highlight true extent of road trauma
  • May act as barrier to convincing motorists of need to heed road safety messages & need for new countermeasures

Fleiter & Watson, 2012
• Not all behaviours are the same, therefore not all solutions are the same

• Need to:
  • Promote understanding of road safety gains
  • Continue work to promote change in community norms associated with speeding/phone use
  • Use new technologies to promote safety
  • Influence ‘Cognitions’ within traffic safety culture context
    – Attitudes, values, expectations of violations

• Create a culture accepting of new initiatives aimed at saving lives
Questions

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Mark your Diaries!
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18 – 19 September 2014
Gold Coast, Australia
http://ositconference.com/