

Parental experiences of encouraging compliance with restrictions of Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) during their children's provisional licensing phase

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Abstract

Parental support is an important part of how young novice drivers navigate Queensland's Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) program. During this process parents may have a greater influence on enforcing the restrictions of GDL when compared with traditional policing. However, despite the likely critical value of this role, little is known about parental views or experiences of this process, or how best to support parents effectively in guiding their provisional drivers. For this study, qualitative analysis of interviews with 16 parents of current provisional drivers suggest that parents may fulfil third party functions consistent with concepts of Third Party Policing (TPP).

Background

It is well established that novice drivers face the highest crash risk, especially within the first 6 months of obtaining a licence (Bates, Davey, Watson, King, & Armstrong, 2014b). GDL systems, which consist of learner, provisional and open licence phases, are designed to address this elevated crash risk by restricting the novice drivers exposure to high risk situations while still allowing them to gain driving experience (Bates et al., 2014a; McCartt, Teoh, Fields, Braitman, & Hellinga, 2010; Williams & Shults, 2010).

Traffic law enforcement is the most commonly used initiative to modify driver behaviour and therefore reduce the incidence of traffic crashes (Bates, Soole, & Watson, 2012). However, the provisions within a GDL system are difficult for police officers to enforce (Allen, Murphy, & Bates, 2015; Hedlund, 2007) and such systems rely on parental influence (Chaudhary, Williams, & Casanova, 2010; Shults, 2010; Williams, Leaf, Simons-Morton, & Hartos, 2006). However, whilst parental TPP may provide a useful model to improve compliance, little research has investigated the applicability of this model or of parental experiences of enforcement functions.

Method

Qualitative, semi-structured telephone interviews with 16 parents of 18 provisionally licenced drivers (13 in their first year, and 5 in their second year of provisional licensure) were conducted. Participants were recruited by promotion of the study to employees of a large metropolitan university in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Questions focussed on parental knowledge of restrictions on provisional licences and their experiences with encouraging compliance. Analysis of transcripts was conducted by a Psychologist using NVivo software to extract themes.

Results

Broad knowledge of the restrictions was strong with all parents aware of zero alcohol requirements for provisional drivers, and most knew that restrictions on passengers and mobile phone use were in place, but frequently did not know the specific details of the GDL requirements. Most parents implemented their own, complementary rules and restrictions. For example:

“One person in the car after about 10 o’clock at night, outside of family members...we have our own family restrictions as well...we don’t allow him to take friends in the car”.

Parents developed teaching relationships with their children using linguistic forms and non-language based methods. They expressed beliefs that, although their children did not like the rules, they were sensible, found it easy to comply with parental and GDL restrictions, and parents perceived that their children planned ahead. Some parents suggested that compliance was assisted by processes of social norming amongst similar-age provisionally-licensed friendship groups. Rather than resenting or resisting the responsibility for providing practical and emotional support for compliance, parents viewed the tasks of encouraging compliance with restrictions as part of their parental responsibility. Parents expressed support for the GDL rules, believing that these make it easier for parents to keep their children safe, and reported that they were happy to reinforce them.

Conclusions

Parents endorse GDL rules and traditional enforcement methods. However, their lack of knowledge of specific GDL requirements may motivate the development of their own complementary restrictions. This and other themes identified in the transcripts of the focus groups suggest that parents are operating as TPP agents. Future research to see if this is consistent across states and GDL programs is planned as well as research into the provisional drivers’ experience of parental TPP.

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