

Novice Drivers and Parents: Exploring the Feasibility of Third Party Policing in Reducing Young Driver Offending

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Abstract

Parents are ideally placed to partner police in ensuring their children do not violate traffic laws. While studies in Queensland suggest that Third Party Policing is an appropriate theoretical framework to guide interventions, the effect of jurisdiction is unclear. To explore whether the framework is applicable in different contexts, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 parents and 11 of their children in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The ACT has a contrasting licensing structure featuring fewer licensing requirements and restrictions and compulsory pre-learner education, making it unique amongst Australian jurisdictions. Results indicate that parents from different jurisdictions approach driving-related parenting in a way that is consistent with the TPP framework. Developing interventions with a TPP framework that involve parents and utilise regional knowledge, may increase compliance amongst novice drivers.

Background

Young newly licensed drivers have higher crash rates than other groups (Bates et al., 2014). To date, the most successful countermeasure to reduce these crashes is Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL). However, young drivers do not always comply with traffic laws (Bates et al., 2014). While traffic law enforcement is used to change driver behaviour (Bates et al., 2014) and seems to have public support (Shaaban, 2017), recent Australian studies have indicated that formal deterrence approaches are not sufficient in policing young drivers (Allen, Murphy & Bates, 2015).

Third Party Policing (TPP) is a form of joint policing or support provided to police in order for them to maintain law and order (Smith & Alpert, 2011). TPP has been successfully applied in contexts such as controlling drug, alcohol and disorder crimes in entertainment areas (Manning, Mazerolle, Mazerolle & Collingwood, 2014) and limiting the production of methamphetamines (Webster, Mazerolle, Ransley & Mazerolle, 2017). However, it is yet to be trialled and evaluated in road policing. Given that there is an implicit assumption within GDL systems that parents should be involved and influence their children at both the learner (Bates, Watson, & King, 2014) and provisional stages (Brookland, Begg, Langley, & Ameratunga, 2014), they are ideal candidates to partner with police within a TPP framework. Recent research with Queensland parents identified that, even when they did not have full knowledge of GDL requirements, parents believed themselves responsible for encouraging their young drivers' compliance with licence restrictions (Belsham, Lennon, Matthews & Bates, 2016). However, given the diverse GDL restrictions across Australia, the impact of jurisdictional differences remains unclear. For instance, Queensland implicitly encourages parental involvement by requiring novices to complete 100 hours of supervised driving practice as a learner. In contrast, new drivers in the Australian Capital Territory complete a compulsory driver education course. Therefore, this study explores the utility of a TPP framework in a jurisdiction with a differing GDL system, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

Method

Participants were recruited through *Road Ready* centres (a provider of the compulsory pre-learner driver program) in the ACT, print media, and local radio stations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 parents (14 mothers and 2 fathers) of 26 provisional drivers (12 girls, 14 boys; age range of 17 to 24 years old). Of these young people, 11 agreed to participate in the study (6 males, 5

females), aged 17 ($n = 8$) and 18 ($n = 3$) years. All interviews were conducted by telephone and participants were compensated with gift certificates. Transcripts were then analysed using Nvivo 11 software.

Results

Parents from the ACT reported similar beliefs to Queensland parents and were consistent with the TPP framework being applicable. For instance, ACT parents believed they had a responsibility to support their new driver to comply with the laws. However, jurisdiction does appear to influence the manner in which this occurs. Analysis of parenting styles, which were established through parental and provisional driver reports, also suggests that an authoritative parenting style may be associated with a more accurate understanding of the difficulties faced by novice drivers. Parents with the authoritative style also appear to provide various forms of support to assist their young person to comply with GDL restrictions.

Conclusions

Parental beliefs in relation to their parenting responsibilities, their willingness to support novice driver compliance, together with their lack of knowledge of the GDL system in the ACT suggests that the TPP framework has value particularly when combined with regional knowledge. Specific interventions based on this framework may thus be effective at improving compliance in novice drivers. Moreover, parents appeared to be actively seeking guidance, which suggests the uptake of such interventions may be high. We suggest there is a need to develop an intervention that utilises this framework.

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