

Perspectives of Young New Zealanders on Driver Licensing and Road Safety

Yvonne Mitchell and Dr Vanessa Beanland

Department of Psychology
University of Otago, Dunedin





Background

- **Some statistics**

Under 25s comprise over 50% of at-fault drivers (Ministry of Transport, 2020). In 2018: 95 fatal crashes and 632 serious injury crashes (Waka Kotahi New Zealand Transport Agency, 2020)

- **Research insights**

Young Māori are more likely to have driven pre-licensed (Begg et al., 2012) and less likely to progress through GDL stages (Langley et al., 2012). Māori adults may experience specific cultural issues e.g. reliance on *whānau* (Raerino et al., 2013)

- **Small exploratory focus group study** (Mitchell, 2019).

Primary barriers: lack of confidence, cultural, inadequate support, lack of incentive, intergenerational disregard for having a licence, lack of appropriate education and training

- **Social Learning Theory**

Observing and imitating others, as well as experiencing punishments (being fined for violating restrictions) and rewards (getting to a destination faster), likely contributes to risky driving behaviours among young drivers (Scott-Parker et al., 2012) [information gap: influencers?]

Research Aims

1

Understand

- Understand how young driver's road safety attitudes and driving behaviours may be influenced by others such as parents, siblings, friends, and wider *whānau*.

2

Explore

- Explore how young drivers could be influenced more positively: more likely to obtain licensure, drive according the rules of driving in New Zealand, or progress through the licensing stages.

3

Identify

- Identify what supports may be the most influential to target when planning interventions to improve road safety among young drivers in New Zealand.

Current Study Methods

- Eleven pair-interview sessions (with a friend), with semi-structured questions
- Total $N=22$ young drivers aged 15-24 years (5 male and 17 female)
- NZ Māori ($n=7$), NZ European ($n=7$), NZ Māori/NZ European ($n=1$), NZ European/Samoan ($n=1$), and ($n=6$) chose not to specify their ethnicity
- Discussions in English but included *te reo* Māori and Māori cultural concepts
- Incorporated *mihi* (greetings and introductions), *whakawhanaungatanga* (establishing relationships and connections), *karakia* (traditional prayer to ensure favourable outcomes), *kai* (food to demonstrate *manaakitanga* - hospitality); participants received a voucher *koha* (gift with connotations of reciprocity)
- Discussions transcribed verbatim and coded for themes in NVivo 12*

*Data from the previous focus group participants was also re-coded to provide a larger sample. Five focus groups ($n=4-6$). Total $N=23$ rangatahi aged between 15-24 years (18 female and 5 male)



Parental Influence

Negative

- Parents who were unable to supervise
- Passing on bad habits
- General disregard for license importance “*there was just a ‘didn’t give a shit’ vibe about licences in general, so I didn’t give that much regard*”
- Expectation to drive regardless of whether they were licensed

Cause of stress

- Parents were described as critical and discouraging; “*probably worse having them in the car than not*”
- Many did not want to practice with parents because of “*screaming*” or “*using invisible brakes on their side*”
- Young drivers felt nervous and had reduced confidence

Positive

- Parental availability and willingness to practice
- Financial assistance “*my dad paid for mine, and I was thinking if I did fail, I’d be like wasting his money*”.
- Direct encouragement and emphasising license importance
- Teaching them “*what not to do*”

Wider Whānau Influence

- Cousins
- Aunties and uncles
- Grandparents

“...I guess the relationship we have is somewhat like a parent-child relationship”

Positive

- Able to teach them how to drive
- Available to supervise driving practice
- Being supportive “*always like, if you make a mistake it's okay*”
- Encouraging the pursuit of obtaining a licence
- More likely to emphasize the importance of adhering to speed limits and licence restrictions

Negative

- When those in the wider family did not progress





Friends

Negative

- General disregard for licence importance
"they were driving without their licence and so I sort of thought it was okay too"
- Pressure or obligation to drive friends regardless of having a licence
- Hearing about friends' negative driving or testing experience reduced their confidence

Positive

- Peer pressure as an indirect encouragement
 - Useful driving tips, qualified and able to supervise, offer to use their car
-

"I feel like my friends have been the most impactful in the way I behave when I'm driving"



A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a blue clipboard. The clipboard has a white form attached, which is a 'Driver's license' application form. The form has fields for 'Name', 'Address', 'Date of birth', 'Sex', 'Eye colour', 'Hair colour', 'Height', 'Weight', 'Blood group', 'Medical history', 'Driving history', and 'Signature'. The person is wearing a grey jacket. The background is blurred, showing a white car and orange traffic cones.

Driver License Testing Officers

Negative

- Perception of a pass rate quota
“have to maintain a certain failure rate”
- Māori more worried about this quota compared to non-Māori
“so they’ve like decided that before you even get in the car, let alone their own prejudices”
- Ethnicity of the testing officer was also perceived by Māori as a potential limiting factor of licence progression
“it could be a coin flip of what [their ethnicity] is and who they are... they could just fail you just like that, just because they don’t like your race or something”

School

- **Overwhelming positive support** for receiving road safety education through schools
- Competitive environment encouraging participants to obtain licensure: “*like a race*” between classmates
- Providing financial assistance (testing fees, formal lessons)

Of note:

- Some justified unlicensed driving or violations of driving restrictions because of a need to get to school and/or drive friends or siblings to school



Advice to Main Influencers

1. Be understanding when supervising or teaching

"they'll make mistakes, so like don't stress them out"

2. Be positive about driving

"positive, not like be careful you're gonna crash"

3. Try to be calm

"when the person that's teaching you is nervous, you instantly get nervous"

4. Have patience

"just give them time because everyone progresses differently, and people go at their own pace"

5. Try to be available to supervise

"going for practice drives and stuff like that really does help a lot"

6. Understand the road code and drive safely

"like, be a good role model"

7: Be as supportive as you can

"just be encouraging"



- **School** may be a useful source of education regarding road safety and driver licensing
- Consider **targeted initiatives** for different populations within the young driver category
- Consider **alternative supports** for those who may not have a positive and supportive influence
- Māori more likely to seek out the help of wider whānau- highlights a real **strength of the culture**
- Perhaps a need to address the **perception of a pass-rate quota**, and perception by Māori that testing officers are more prejudiced toward them
- Continue allowing young New Zealand drivers to **share their perspectives** to inform transport initiatives

Thoughts and Future Directions

References

Begg, D., Sullman, M., & Samaranayaka, A. (2012). The characteristics of young pre-licensed drivers: Evidence from the New Zealand Drivers Study. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 45, 539-546. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2011.09.006>

Langley, J., Begg, D., Brookland, R., Samaranayaka, A., Jordan, H., & Davie, G. (2012). Non-progression through graduated driver licensing: characteristics, traffic offending, and reasons for non-progression. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 13(1), 7-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15389588.2011.635170>

Ministry of Transport. (2020). Number of road traffic deaths. https://www.who.int/gho/road_safety/mortality/number_text/en/

Mitchell, Y. (2019). Rangatahi Māori perspectives on road safety and driver licensing [Unpublished manuscript]. University of Otago.

Scott-Parker, B., Watson, B., King, M. J., & Hyde, M. K. (2012). “They’re lunatics on the road”: Exploring the normative influences of parents, friends, and police on young novices’ risky driving decisions. *Safety science*, 50(9), 1917-1928. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2012.05.014>

Waka Kotahi New Zealand Transport Agency. (2020). Young drivers. <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/safety/driving-safely/young-drivers/>

Driving instructor slide image. <https://images.app.goo.gl/Ub917pFmEojH6suy7>

Parental influence slide image. <https://images.app.goo.gl/XXSe6EwVtNeRmMEu5>

Background slide image. <https://images.app.goo.gl/U9iYvXMHjodwuLLx6>

Wider whānau slide image. <https://www.allstate.com/blog/tips-for-teaching-your-teen-driver>

Friends slide image. <https://www.thebalance.com/who-is-insured-to-drive-my-car-527461>