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Adolescent males' driving behaviour

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## **Executive summary**

There is widespread consensus that young adults are over-represented in motor vehicle accident statistics. This report presents findings of research undertaken in the Newcastle region that analysed young males' driving behaviour and their attitudes towards the question of road safety. The overall research objectives conducted for the Federal Office of Road Safety was to:

- Investigate the relationship between young males' attitudes towards driver education and driving practices;
- Identify how the social construction of masculinity (including peer pressure) influences driving behaviour;
- Collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data from males ranging in age from 16 and 26 years;
- Determine if socio-economic factors play a role in shaping attitudes towards driver education and driving behaviour; and,
- Examine the spatial distribution and causes of young males' involvement in motor vehicle accidents.

### **Young males' involvement in traffic accidents**

The major findings from a quantitative analysis of the RTA's Hunter region accident data identified that:

- Male drivers aged 17 to 19 years, namely those with the least experience were more likely to be involved in traffic accidents.
- Fifty-one (51) per cent of young male drivers involved in accidents had between 0-3 years driving experience.
- Sixty-two (62) per cent of young male drivers involved in accidents held standard or 'unrestricted' licences.

The analysis also identified major characteristics that distinguished males aged 16 to 26 years involvement in accidents from other drivers. Compared to other drivers, young male drivers:

- More likely to be involved in fatal accidents than other drivers.
- Were twice as likely to be involved in a traffic accident than females of the same age cohort.
- Less likely to wear a restraint.
- More likely to have 'Unknown Speed' recorded against them.
- More likely to lose control of their vehicle.
- Have a greater percentage of their accidents on winding roads than other drivers; and
- Experienced more accidents during the hours of darkness.

## **Attitudes towards road safety education campaigns/issues**

A Questionnaire Survey was conducted with University students, TAFE students, High School students, males from a Youth Access group and young males that congregate around the inner city Foreshore area in Newcastle. Within the Questionnaire Survey respondents were asked to rate particular road safety messages and initiatives from 0 to 5, with 5 indicating as being very important.

- Except for University students, the respondents who participated in the survey were receptive to passive delivery of road safety messages, such as television commercials.
- In regard to road safety education slogans, there was wide support for the slogan "If you drink and drive - you're a bloody idiot. Almost 27 per cent gave this slogan a rating of 5 out of 5.
- There was uniform support and acceptance by young males that drink-driving is not acceptable behaviour.
- Compared to television commercials most of the respondents felt that road safety messages on roadsigns and/or buses had minimal impact on their driving behaviour.
- Speed cameras, and the visible presence of the Police, were perceived as being effective in controlling excessive speeding behaviour among young male drivers.
- Seventy-two (72) per cent of the respondents identified the 'the driver should remain alert' as being the most important factor in road safety.
- University and TAFE students were more supportive of the statement that the minimum age for learning to drive should be raised (36 per cent and 57 per cent respectively).

## **Young males suggestions on the ways road safety could be improved**

Responses and suggestions were uniformly shared between all groups. Their main concerns were with driver education for both young drivers and the more experienced drivers. For young drivers their major suggestions included:

- More rigorous training for 'L' drivers, including defensive driving course.
- Engine restrictions for 'L' and 'P' Plate drivers (similarly to the ones imposed on motorcycle drivers).
- Explicit and graphic films showing the aftermath of road accidents.

Young drivers believed that more experienced 'older' drivers had limited knowledge of current road laws and that they exhibited poor driving behaviour. Because it was perceived that bad driving practices of older drivers were ignored by the Police it was suggested that:

- A 'dob-in-a-bad-driver' campaign would improve the driving standards of all drivers.
- All drivers who had held their licence for 20 years should re-sit a practical and theoretical driving test every five years; and that the
- Police enforce road laws with all drivers.

### **What influences young male drivers' driving attitudes?**

It is important to emphasise that attitudes established in their early years of driving may continue over into adulthood. Among the respondents from the Questionnaire Survey

- Around 70 per cent noted that they had driven before they were legally old enough. The average age that they had first driven was 9 years of age.
- Fifty-six per cent of them identified their father as having a major influence on their early driving behaviour.

### **Young males perception of their own driving ability**

Despite around 40 per cent of all respondents experiencing either loss or points and/or fines for speeding and other traffic offences the vast majority of them were under the perception that:

- Their driving behaviour was far superior than other drivers, especially compared to females and older male drivers.
- Statistics that indicated that young males were more likely to be involved in road traffic accidents were falsely represented; and
- They were deliberately being targeted by the Police.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### YOUNG MALE DRIVERS' DRIVING BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS ROAD SAFETY CAMPAIGNS

##### **1.1 Introduction: background to the research investigating young males' driving behaviour and attitude towards road safety campaigns**

Road traffic accident data indicate that compared to all other drivers, males aged between 16 and 26 years have a greater chance of being involved in road traffic accidents. Accordingly, their over-representation in these statistics places them at greater risk of being killed in motor vehicle accidents than any other age group. The national rate of road mortality, a preventable cause of death, concerns governments and the public alike. However, the alarmingly high rate of youth road mortality warrants young male drivers being a central focus in any analysis of road safety. This report presents the findings of a statistical analysis of driving accidents in the Newcastle RTA region and a questionnaire survey undertaken with males aged 16 to 26 years from October 1996 to January 1997.

The extensive media coverage of road fatalities over Christmas and New Year holiday periods justifiably promoted public and governmental outcry. For example, the horrific 1996-97 holiday road toll prompted calls for uniform national road laws (*Weekend Australian*, 4-5/1/97; *Courier Mail*, 4.1.97). Police, politicians, and the media have focussed much of their attention on three variables - alcohol, speed and fatigue (*Weekend Australian* 28-29/12/96; *Courier Mail*, 2.1.97 and 4.1.97, *Australian*, 3.1.97). Undoubtedly, these elements are important contributory factors to road fatalities. Studies indicate that the introduction of road safety campaigns, the wearing of seat belts, and lower alcohol levels has significantly assisted in lowering the road toll over the past twenty years despite an increase in the numbers of registered vehicles (Robertson L S, 1996). More importantly, there is an overwhelmingly need for all states to implement a coordinated and carefully planned policy that will impact on road safety. However, a concentration on the above stated variables will inevitably result in legislation more concerned with tougher penalties than with correcting reckless driving behaviour. Some recommendations include the introduction of licence disqualification for life, and/or ignition locks to be fitted on vehicles for repeat high-range, drink driver offenders (*Newcastle Herald*, 31.12.96, *Weekend Australian*, 15-16.2.97). The high incidence of alcohol caused accidents cannot be denied, but deterrence is no solution (Legge J S, & Park 1994). In the United States, despite the introduction of tough penalties and the legal drinking age being raised to 21 years in 1984 (Giacopassi D, & Winn 1995), alcohol remains the major cause for around fifty per cent of all fatal road accidents (Angell M & Kassierer, 1994; Klein J L, Anthenellie, Bacon, Smith & Schuckit 1994; Wiczorek W F, Mirand & Callahan 1994). Legislating to punish "bad drivers" is too simplistic a solution in attempts to alleviate road trauma. Drink-driving, inappropriate speeding, and not wearing seat belts are symptoms of bad driving practices, not the cause. Moreover, although many drivers commonly recognise the

inherent dangers of the above elements they may still persist in hazardous driving behaviour (MacDonald T K, Zanna & Fong 1995). Changing attitudes towards reckless driving and identifying ways to encourage safe driving practices remains a challenge. It is widely accepted that young male drivers constitute the group most likely to engage in reckless driving practices (Mundt J C, Ross & Harrington 1992; Thombs D L, Beck, Mahoney, Bromely & Bezon 1994). Surprisingly, little is known about the factors that affect the driving behaviour among male adolescents and young adults (Donovan J E, 1993, p.600). No single theoretical perspective has been offered to account for how and why young males might differentiate from other drivers. This researcher suggests that 'masculinity studies' may offer an understanding in assessing why young males are over-represented in motor vehicle accidents.

## **1.2 Young males driving to death**

On a busy expressway near Newcastle, oblivious to the passing traffic, a couple aged in their forties stand gazing at a wreath placed on a roadside barrier marking the fatal accident site of a 19 year old male. It is an all too familiar scene. Throughout Australia on suburban avenues, rural gravel roads, and along city streets roadside memorials in the form of crosses and flowers are daily reminders of the dangers of driving. A study in the Newcastle area indicated that roadside memorials overwhelmingly commemorated the deaths of young men, and to a lesser extent, young women (Hartig K V & Dunn 1996). In part, the explanation lies with the fact that young men are more likely to be involved in fatal road accidents. Miles (1991) claims that men are the "death sex.... not only the main perpetrators of violence but its chief victims." Certainly, internally and externally focussed aggressions go a long way toward explaining high rates of male suicide and deaths from motor vehicle accidents in Australia (Burnley I H, 1994). Statistically, young males are most at risk. In New South Wales 24 per cent of all those killed in traffic accidents were males aged 17 to 25 (Road and Traffic Authority 1995). As Knott's (1994) historical study of road traffic accidents in New South Wales demonstrated, this age and gender group has consistently dictated road fatality trends. For this reason it is imperative to gain some understanding of young male driving behaviour and attitudes.

Much of the literature on young male drivers focuses exclusively on their poor safety records. Overwhelmingly this is attributed to the consumption of alcohol and/or drugs and their driving inexperience. (Asch P & Levy 1990; Donovan J E, 1993; Hennessy M & Saltz 1990; Johnston V & White 1989; and Mundt, *et al* 1993). Interestingly, it has been noted that young drivers involved in road accidents generally have lower Blood Alcohol Levels than adults (Johnston *et al* 1989). However, this tends to overlook the correlation between inexperience with alcohol combined with a lack of experience in handling motor vehicles. As already noted, drink-driving is continually cited as a major cause. It is a factor that is easily identified. However, on the other hand, driving inexperience, not so readily identified as a factor, has important and largely neglected implications for road safety policies. Young adults are characterised as thrill-seekers, rebellious, and impulsive in their behaviour (Thombs, *et al* 1994). Accordingly, they are perceived as being prone to engaging in reckless, risk-taking driving practices such as speeding and overtaking in adverse conditions. To focus on symptoms of bad driving is counter-productive. Similarly high risk behaviour should not be accepted and/or dismissed as "a problem behaviour 'syndrome' in youth" (Johnston 1989 *et al*).

In order to curtail such problems, it is necessary to (re)construct an understanding of why young drivers, notably young males engage in such damaging behaviour. Studies on masculinity, go some way in achieving this.

### **1.3 Outline of the report**

**Chapter two** presents the methodology that was utilised within this research programme. It outlines the difference between quantitative and qualitative research and presents a brief analysis of masculinity studies. This chapter argues why specific approaches were adopted.

**Chapter three** is concerned with the findings of an indepth analysis of the RTA data for road traffic accidents that have occurred over a five year period (1991-1995) within the Hunter RTA region. By using selective variables it aims to construct a profile of the major characteristics of male driver aged between 16 and 26 years. Additionally young male drivers will be analysed according to the similarities and differences with female drivers of the same age cohort and all other drivers.

**Chapter four** deals with the survey data. The survey questionnaire was designed to elicit quantifiable and qualitative data from young males aged between 16 and 26 years. The main body of the questionnaire collected information relating to driving and attitudes, the final part of the questionnaire was concerned with demographic details.

**Chapter five** reflects on the implications of the research in relation with the social construction of masculinity. This chapter will also examine the relevance and effectiveness of current road safety campaigns and deterrent strategies and suggest alternative measures.

**Chapter six** documents the overall conclusions, recommendations and suggests areas for future research.

### **Conclusion**

The dilemma of the high death rates of young male drivers has been widely recognised. The results of bad driving practices - such as speeding and drink-driving are easily recognised. However, it is necessary to understand why males, particularly young males engage in dangerous driving practices. It has been suggested that a masculinity theoretical framework may assist in understanding the attitudes of young male drivers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology undertaken. The methods were selected in accordance with achieving the key objectives of this research. These objectives were to:

- investigate the relationship between young male's attitudes towards driver education and driving practices;
- identify how the social construction of masculinity (including peer pressure) influences the driving behaviour of young males;
- collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data from males in the age range of 16 to 26 years;
- determine if socio-economic factors play a role in shaping attitudes towards driver education
- examine the spatial distribution and causes of young males' involvement in motor vehicle accidents.

This chapter outlines the research design undertaken for this project and offers an explanation as to why these methods were selected. In order to achieve the above objectives of the research proposal, three methodologies were employed.

- Firstly, quantitative research based on Hunter RTA zone accident data;
- Secondly, qualitative research based on a structured questionnaire survey, and semi-structured interviews with young drivers and police patrol officials; and finally,
- an analysis of masculinity theory.

Much of the literature, including media reports, associates young males' driving behaviour with negative outcomes. Indeed, there would seem to be a societal assumption and expectation that this group is most at risk on our roads. Road traffic accident statistical data confirms this assumption. However, this research specifically wanted to investigate the attitudes of these specific "at risk" drivers. Research into community attitudes to a wide range of road safety initiatives has been undertaken at a national level (Reark Research 1987; Roy Morgan Research 1992). However, no single perspective has offered an account of how young drivers might be differentiated from other drivers. Therefore, it was necessary to conduct a specific quantitative analysis of young male drivers. To gain an insight into the motivation and driving behaviour of young males qualitative research was undertaken. Finally, in order to understand why young males engage in unconventional driving behaviour this research was undertaken from a masculinity theoretical perspective.

Quantitative research focuses primarily on a secondary analysis of statistical indicators. Such investigations are useful for policy research. To account for how and why young

male drivers differ from and/or to highlight similar driving traits to all other drivers, the methodology included a quantitative analysis of all motor vehicle accidents in the Hunter RTA region over a five year period. Moreover, due to increasing concern over young females increasing involvement in traffic accidents this study compared young males aged between 16 and 26 years with females of the same age cohort. Qualitative research, mainly used by social scientists is generally guided by theoretical research. It is concerned with causal processes and explanation. Accordingly, qualitative research adopted within this study involved a structured questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews with young males and unstructured interviews with police traffic patrol officers. The researcher has suggested that 'masculinity studies' could offer a theoretical framework within which to provide an explanation as to why young males are excessively represented in motor vehicle accidents. Thus, the methodology involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods analysed from a masculinity theoretical approach. This ensured that the research encompassed descriptive causal analysis as well as being reinforced by analytical measurements and a theoretical understanding.

## **2.2 Quantitative research - analysis of RTA dataset**

Computers now enable organisations to amass extensive data bases for their pertinent statistics. The Road and Traffic Authority (RTA) in New South Wales are no exception. The Hunter RTA region extends from south of Gosford to north of Taree and west to Merriwa (see Figure 2.1). The dataset covered all road traffic accidents in the Hunter RTA zone over a five year period (July 1991 -July 1995). This dataset is ultimately concerned with providing data to assist in the long-term aim of governmental decision making relating to road safety policies. A distinctive feature of policy driven datasets that differentiates it from qualitative data is its focus on accountable factors (or variables). The dataset used for this research involved 18,480 cases. Each case was cross-tabbed with 162 variables. The variables covered a wide range of issues pertinent to driving behaviour, locational and weather factors. Understandably, any quantitative analysis is subject to the constraints of these variables. For example, confidentiality restricted access to data relating to some illegal practices such as whether alcohol was involved. Names were not included, but factors such as age of controllers, location and date of crash could potentially identify those involved through local media and/or court reporting's. Given time and finance, this data could have been uncovered. However, it was decided that the survey was more interested in ascertaining attitudes towards issues of drink-driving than documenting the extent of deviant driving practices. All of the males interviewed were aware of the risks associated with drink driving, with many of them openly condemning drink-driving practices. This finding corresponds with research undertaken into community attitudes to road safety that noted that 52 per cent of male drivers aged between 15 and 24 years stated that the statement "if I am driving, I don't drink" was applicable to them (Roy Morgan 1992). A primary objective of the quantitative analysis was to construct a profile of young male drivers. This objective was to achieve two aims. Firstly, to demonstrate how they differ from all other drivers and to highlight their similarities with all other drivers and, secondly, to compare the differences and similarities with females' drivers of the same age cohort.

### 2.3 The selected variables

The major initial difficulty posed at the beginning of the research was how to select relevant variables from such a large data base. In order to make the project manageable all the variables were examined in relation to their statistical and theoretical relevance to this study. Using a SPSS package this involved factor analysis; normal distributions; and chi-square tests. The factor analysis identified nine variables that were considered statistical significant (Table 2.1). A further twenty variables were selected for further analysis. A detailed analysis of the variables selected by the factor analysis process and other selected variables was undertaken. However, many of these variables were not significant, either in relation to their significance to young male drivers or that the data produced very low percentages across the range of sub-sets. It was decided to focus on variables that could be characterised as risk factors in accident data. Such variables included age, gender, stated speed; crash day; alignment of road. natural light; error factor, and degree of crash injury.

**Table 2.1: Factor analysis for male drivers aged 16-26 years**

VARIABLE	EIGENVALUE
Road alignment	1.91737
Controller's age	1.81322
Controller restraint	1.68534
Crash date	1.41495
Crash day	1.29822
Crash time	1.15079
Degree of injury	1.05651
Driver experience	1.001350
Type of licence	1.00311

One of the intended objectives of this study was to investigate the spatial distribution and causes of young males' involvement in motor vehicle accidents. Although it was possible to determine the place of residence (by post code) of each controller, the objective to map accident sites proved too ambitious. On the otherhand, the adoption of a quantitative methodology enabled the research to:

- identify the major causes of young males' involvement in motor vehicle accidents; and
- collect and conduct comparable studies of road traffic accident involvement for males ranging in age from 16 and 26 years with all other drivers and females of the same age cohort.

Understanding why these trends emerge involves more detailed exploratory methods.

### 2.4 Qualitative research - questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews

A major component of this research is concerned with an analysis of a questionnaire survey. Questionnaires are essential for descriptive, explanatory and exploratory research. The questionnaire survey of males aged between 16 and 26 years regarding road safety issues is twelve pages long (Appendix 1). The questionnaire encompasses a number of basic demographic questions relating to age, socio-economic status, etc., as

well as questions regarding driving experience, driving convictions and motivational data. It also included questions with scales developed to measure attitudes towards driving safety issues. Following ethical guidelines stipulated by The University of Newcastle Ethics Committee, confidentiality was assured and a stamped addressed envelope was attached to each form. More importantly, due to ethical reasons, it was not possible to directly request information from the respondents regarding illegal activities such as drink-driving or speeding. Indeed, at the request of the Ethics Committee an attachment was placed advising respondents of counselling services telephone numbers if any questions (such as in relation to motor vehicle accidents) should cause distress. To elicit self-reporting of illegal driving practices many of the questions were designed to give the respondent the option for further personal comments. With very few exceptions the respondents took advantage of this opportunity. Their comments revealed an insight into the personality of the respondent and enabled the researcher to construct a comprehensive picture of the perception and attitudes of young male drivers' about their driving ability and road-safety. More significantly, their responses revealed their personal construction of gender and how this corresponded with hegemonic masculinity. The information collected this way negated the need to conduct unstructured interviews with young males. Using a modified questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 49 respondents. Additionally, an unstructured interview was conducted with two road traffic patrol police officers in Newcastle.

## **2.5 The questionnaire survey participants**

The intended questionnaire research method has undergone some modification. Initially, it was intended to collect around 600 surveys from four groups of males. This would include high school students, TAFE students, university students and young male car enthusiasts commonly referred to as 'rev-heads' that frequent the Newcastle foreshore area at weekends. These four groups were selected as it was considered that they were fairly representative of young males in Newcastle. However, the last group were considered to be 'too ill-defined' and because youth unemployment is particularly high in this region it was decided they should be replaced by an unemployed group. Gaining access to young unemployed males proved problematic. Government agencies are unwilling to divulge information and although Skill-Share managers were sympathetic to the survey, financial constraints has curtailed much of their activities in the Newcastle district. Youth Access in Newcastle (YAN) an organisation that advises youth on a range of issues was cooperative. However, the response rate of 14 from a possible 50 determined that the former fourth group would have to be included. The obvious difficulties of accessing a group engaged in illegal activities such as 'drag-racing' were overcome by making modifications to the survey. The likelihood of this group returning surveys even accompanied by stamped envelopes was considered unlikely. Therefore it was decided that semi-structured interviews modified from the larger questionnaire would be conducted over two weekends during day-light hours. Semi-structured interviews can create some bias in the responses. However, there are some advantages. It is generally assumed that postal questionnaires are open to corruption as this method allows the participants to sabotage research anonymously. On the otherhand face to face interviews with sub-cultures obsessed with motor vehicles and speed may introduce some 'bravado' in their responses. For example the

49 males interviewed at Newcastle foreshore area experienced the highest levels of driving related convictions.

## **2.6 Distribution and response rate of the questionnaire survey**

University students are frequently involved in surveys and because Newcastle is a university city many of the High Schools receive frequent requests for survey work to be undertaken with their students. Most school principals were reluctant to give approval for this survey to be undertaken at their school. Given the nature of the survey, this is somewhat surprising, especially as so many principals had some comment on the hazardous way young drivers drove. For example, one principal replied "don't talk to me about young male drivers, I know all about the hoons that drive down my street." In sharp contrast to the schools, the TAFE institute in Newcastle was particularly receptive to the request for the survey to include TAFE students. Accordingly, it was decided to use TAFE students for the pilot study. The response rate of thirty returned questionnaires out of fifty questionnaires distributed proved rewarding. Additionally, because there were no apparent problems with the survey questions it was decided that no changes were necessary. A total of 250 questionnaires (including the pilot 50) was distributed among TAFE students. The response rate of 181 (representing a return rate of 72 per cent) was overwhelming. This indicates, that either this group is neglected in surveys, and/or the topic was particularly interesting to them. Two hundred surveys were distributed among university students attending lectures in the Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences and in the Department of Engineering. The response rate of 113 for this group represents just over a 56 per cent response. As already stated university students are regularly requested to complete questionnaires and therefore exhibit indifference to such requests. On the otherhand, approximately 12 male students approached me informally with their opinions on many of the questions. Interestingly, other researchers to increase participation involving university students offered incentives such as payment or lottery tickets for those returning completed questionnaires (Agostinelli G & Miller 1993; Donovan 1993).

Despite authorisation from the Department of Education, as already noted the majority of Newcastle schools (both private and public) were reluctant to allow the questionnaire survey to be undertaken with their students. Three public schools and two private schools did give permission. One private and one public school was located outside the Newcastle city area at Maitland and Cessnock respectively. The response rate of 76 from 250 surveys from the public schools represents a rather low return rate of 30 per cent. In contrast 64 surveys returned from a possible 80 distributed to private schools demonstrates a response rate of 80 per cent. There was a higher response rate from private schools, perhaps because of the willingness of staff members at the schools to participate in the survey. For example, at both private schools, a box was placed at the main office for the students to return their completed surveys which the schools' administrative staff then forwarded to the researcher. It should be noted that at both private and public schools, some members of staff aged under 26 years also completed questionnaire surveys. Leaving aside the semi-structured, modified questionnaire survey of 49 males at the Foreshore area, the 448 participants represent an overall response rate of 57 per cent.



## **2.7 Unstructured interviews**

From many of the questionnaires it was clear that young males tended to believe that police patrol officers deliberately “targetted” them. “I was pissed off because other drivers were going the same speed as me, but I was the only one stopped” was commonly noted on many of the questionnaire survey forms. Police, due their official status, have discretionary powers. This power extends to who, when, and why they stop particular drivers. Specific drivers are targetted for instances of dangerous driving practices and/or exceeding the speed limit. Many other drivers are stopped randomly to assist in the prevention of drink-driving activities, or for licence and/or vehicle roadworthy checks. In regard to the former, there is a high level of community support and acceptance for Random Breath Testing patrols (Roy Morgan 1992). For licence checks, and/or roadworthy checks random checks are not necessarily in the strictest sense random (Williamson 1996). Understandably, police will tend to apprehend the appropriate driver. The RTA Hunter region statistics indicate that only 22 per cent of drivers involved in traffic accidents drove a vehicle less than ten years old. Whether or not police deliberately target young drivers is a moot point. The reality is that young male drivers are the driving group more likely to engage in dangerous driving practices and drive vehicles that may require mechanical attention. The primary focus of the interviews with two police patrol officers was to determine their perceptions of the difficulties facing young male drivers.

## **2.8 A theoretical framework**

The dilemma of the high death rates prevalent among young male drivers is widely recognised. The results of bad driving practices - such as speeding and drink-driving are easily recognised. However, it is necessary to understand why males, particularly young males engage in hazardous and all too often fatal driving practices. It is suggested that a masculinity theoretical framework may assist in understanding the attitudes of young male drivers.

### **2.8.1 Understanding young males**

In recent years the question of masculinity within the realms of gender studies has become both a cultural and an intellectual problem (Connell R W 1993). It is now widely accepted that gender is not innate in the individual but is instead a learned social construction. Males construct and validate their behaviour within the context and norms of social behaviour (Bird S R 1996). In otherwords, the behaviour of males and their construction of masculinity cannot be divorced from its institutional context. Male practices that are socially dominant are represented as hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1991; Donaldson M 1993). Overwhelmingly, society continues to associate masculinity with power, influence, and dominance (Steinberg W 1993). Masculinity is valued through various forms of power, including control over women, over other men and over machines and technology (Segal L 1993). This assumption of male superiority and power is lived out and reinforced within the social system.

The formation and learning of masculinity begin in the home, continues at school, in the workplace and within the social network. From an early age, compared to the female child, the male child is generally allowed to explore more freely and play more

adventurously (Miles 1991). Fathers also play a significant role in the early construction of masculinity as they generally show a far greater anxiety than mothers that their sons grow up to be "regular guys" (Miles 1991). Peer pressure begins in school when boys find themselves competing against each other "to impress their mates" (Fisher N 1992) This competitiveness, to be 'one of the boys' continues into adult life. Competition with other males, whether it is expressed through sporting, work and/or social activities, provides a stage for establishing oneself as an individual and also appropriately masculine (Bird 1996). Extreme masculine stereotypes are readily identified in 'macho Rambo type' movies and further typified in many male sports, such as motor racing (Edgley C 1987). The challenge for being quintessential male is driven by the fear of feminine identification (Segal 1991; Steinberg 1993). Being male inevitably involves exaggerated and aggressive masculine posturing. All too frequently the construction of hegemonic masculinity involves violence, danger, and sometimes death.

Such damaging constructions of masculinity are readily accepted within society. The 'rites of passage' associated with traditional societies has been given as an analogy of the damaging behavioural practices of young males (Pleck J H 1982; Farrow J A & Brissing 1990; Segal 1990; Miles 1991). Such analogies appear appropriate. Adolescent male tribal initiation rites into manhood mark a separation from childhood and identification with females. The male child entering manhood is endowed with power and, generally, control over resources. It is not an easy passage. Ceremonies generally involve the infliction of ritualised violence and pain. Such pain is endured to promote bonding and identification with other males in the community. Farrow *et al* (1990) argues that western society, lacking a "rites of passage", utilises competence over the motor vehicle to mark the transition from boyhood to manhood. Undeniably, the motor vehicle serves as a means of engendering power through independence from the family milieu. However gaining mastery of a motor vehicle coincides with other 'rites of passage' for Australian youth. At the age of 17-18 years they are in the process of studying for their Higher School Certificates; leaving school; gaining employment or placement in tertiary institutions. More significantly, most young adolescents within this age group have had some initial experiences with drugs and alcohol. Leaving aside emotional aspects demonstrated by the high rate of youth suicide, these acts represent major milestones involving decisions that may affect their future lives. All these factors contribute to adolescents transition from childhood to adulthood.

It is widely accepted that males' mastery of the motor vehicle will include handling risky, dangerous and competitive driving (Farrow *et al* 1990). Undoubtedly, such behaviour is influenced by notions of powerfulness and autonomy. However, there has been little research that has examined these factors as predictors of hazardous driving behaviour among young males.

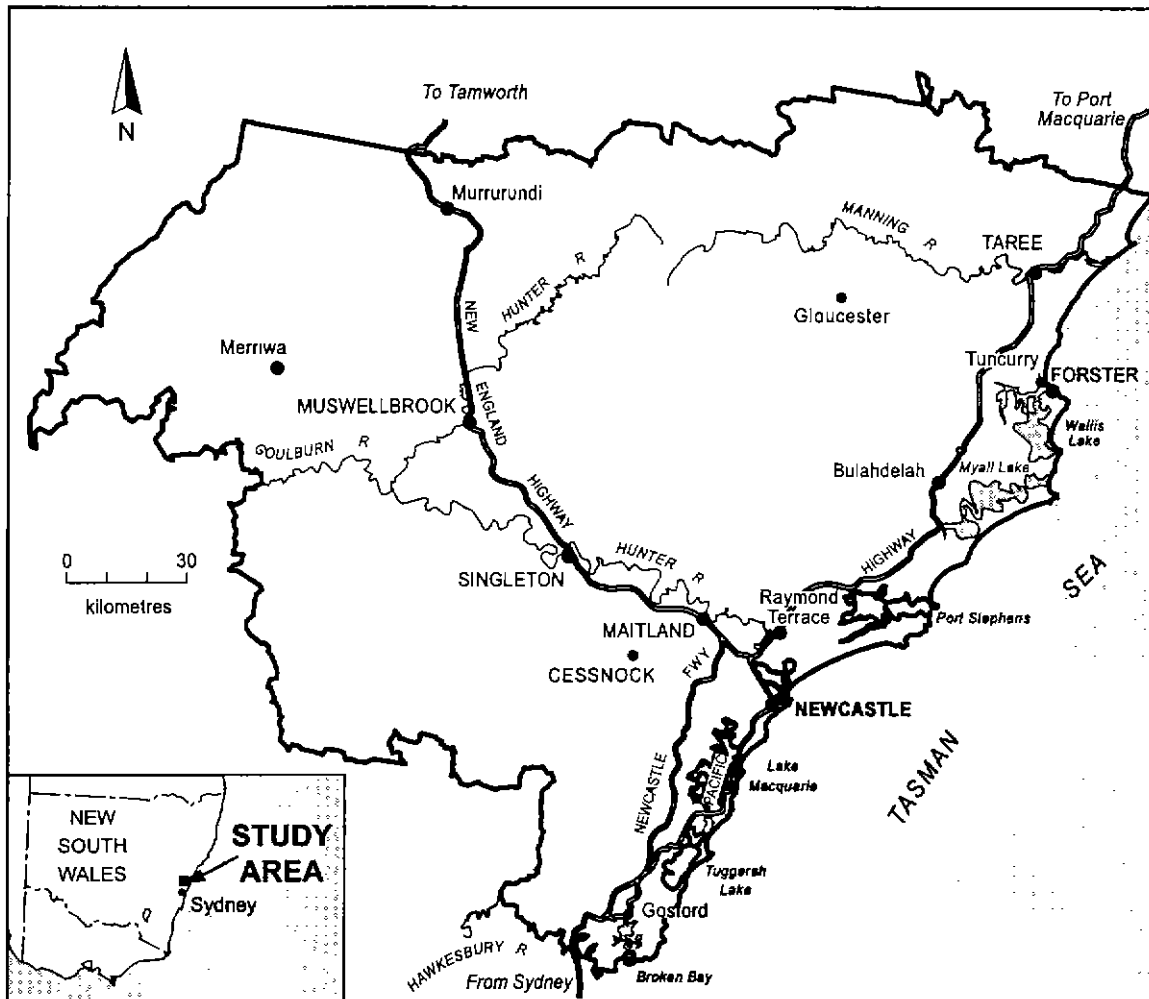


Figure 2.1 Hunter RTA Region

## CHAPTER THREE

### AN ANALYSIS OF ROAD VEHICLE ACCIDENT DATA FOR THE HUNTER RTA REGION

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the findings of an indepth analysis of the RTA data for road traffic accidents that have occurred over a five year period (1991-1995) within the Hunter RTA region. The main aim of this analysis is to construct a profile of male drivers aged 16 to 26 years. In order to achieve this aim the analysis will in particular:

- determine to what extent males aged between 16 and 26 years are involved in motor vehicle accidents;
- highlight similarities and differences between young male drivers with females of the same age cohort and with all other drivers; and
- examine variables that may offer an explanation as to why this group is most at risk.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the RTA data consists of a comprehensive and extensive dataset. To attempt to incorporate all possible aspects of this source is beyond the scope of the research. A careful examination of the data and a Factor Analysis has resulted in the selection of specific variables. These variables were identified as being most pertinent to a study on young male drivers. It is important to note that the following tables have been disaggregated from cross-tabulations that were conducted across a wider analysis of the data. Where it is considered appropriate, comparisons are made with females of the same age cohort and with 'all drivers'.

#### 3.2 Age and gender of controllers involved in motor vehicle accidents

The motor vehicle accident data for the Hunter RTA region revealed that in relation to the number of controllers there were 18,433 valid cases with 47 missing cases. This made a total of 18,480 cases. Table 3.1 indicates that with 11,871 males and 6,562 females the gender of the controller was overwhelmingly biased towards males. Indeed, males were the controller for 64.2 per cent of the cases.

**Table 3.1: controller by gender**

Controller	Total number	Per cent
Male	11871	64.2
Female	6562	35.5
No controller	12	0.1
Unknown	35	0.1
Total	18480	100

Taking female and male drivers aged 16 and 26 years together, they represent 36 per cent of the total cases (Table 3.2). The rate of young drivers' (male and female) involvement in accidents is vividly demonstrated in Figure 3.1, especially for those aged between 17 and 20 years. Males dominate these statistics. Indeed, for the 16 to 26 years age cohort, males involvement in accidents is double the female participation rates (Table 3.2). At an individual gender/age level of analysis, the critical age for

males and females is 18 years (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). Within their respective gender and age cohort, 18 year old males are the controller in 13.5 per cent of accidents and 18 year old females are the controller for 13.7 per cent of accidents. In regard to all accidents documented for males aged between 16 and 26 years, fifty per cent of all accidents are attributed to those aged between 17 and 20 years. It is noteworthy that whereas male involvement declines with age, female involvement tends to fluctuate. As Figure 3.3 demonstrates twenty year old females are involved in almost as many accidents as their 18 year old counterparts.

**Table 3.2: controller aged 16-26 years**

Controller	Total number	Per cent (%)
Males 16-26yrs	4399	23.8
Females 16-26yrs	2263	12.2
Total	6662	36.00

Statistically, females are involved in fewer motor vehicle accidents than males. However, it has been noted that with the trend towards more young women driving and the increase in female car ownership, in time, many of the gender differences will be reduced or even eliminated (*The Sunday Times*, 9.3.97). Certainly there has been much commentary on the increase in the number of women driving while under the influence of alcohol (Hernandez A C, Newcomb & Rabow 1994; Moore R H 1994; Wells-Parker E, Pang, Anderson, McMillen & Miller 1991). In recognition of such trends it is vital to ascertain the extent of similarities and/or differences in their involvement in road traffic accidents with males of the same age group.

Fig.3.1. (Graph) Male and female controllers 0-90 years

Fig 3.2. (Graph) Male controllers aged 16-26 years

Fig 3.3. (Graph) Female controllers aged 16-26 years.

### 3.3 Assessing culpability

Generally, unless it is a fatal accident, there is very little media attention given to road vehicle accidents. In the Hunter RTA region 5.2 per cent (representing a total of 960 deaths) of all accidents over the five year period were fatal. Many accidents, although not fatal, have long term health complications, physically and psychologically. All road trauma must be considered as a preventable health hazard. It is wrong to ascribe culpability to all drivers involved in fatal accidents. Nevertheless the link between negative driving practices and fatal accidents, however tenuousness must be highlighted. Other variables that can be described as identifying culpable driving include speed; error factor; and in relation to degree of injury the use of a restraint.

### 3.3.1 Degree of crash injury

**Table 3.3: degree of crash injury (per cent)**

Degree of injury	Males 16-26yrs	Females 16-26yrs	All drivers
Fatal	6.2	3.7	5.2
Admitted injury	32.9	22.4	29.6
Treated injury	54.3	66.6	57.2
Base (count)	4399	2263	18468

Table 3.3 reinforces the importance of research into young male drivers. Males aged between 16 and 26 years of age are twice as likely to be involved in an fatal accident than females of the same age group. Interestingly, young females are more likely to have treated injuries than any other group. This could be due to the predisposition of females to readily access medical attention in contrast to males who tend to ignore and/or understate health related issues.

**Table 3.4: degree of crash injury - males aged 16-26 years (per cent)**

Degree of injury	16yrs	17yrs	18yrs	19yrs	20yrs	21yrs	22yrs	23yrs	24yrs	25yrs	26yrs
Fatal	4.8	4.3	7.6	7.5	6.4	8.7	2.5	6.6	6.2	7.7	4.2
Admitted injury	31.0	30.9	33.6	36.4	33.8	31.0	34.3	31.9	31.3	30.1	34.2
Treated injury	56.0	57.7	53.4	49.7	53.5	54.5	55.8	56.9	53.4	54.9	54.2
Base count	168	530	592	557	471	435	405	364	307	286	284

An examination of young male drivers' Degree of crash by age (Table 3.4), indicates that involvement in fatal accidents is highest for those males aged between 18 and 21 years. Males aged 21 years recorded the highest per cent involvement in fatal accidents. Although Figure 3.2 suggests that involvement in accidents declined with age, all males within this age cohort are equally susceptible to being involved in a fatal accident. For example, 25 year olds exhibited the second highest per cent involvement in fatal accidents. For each age group approximately one third recorded admitted injury, and in excess of fifty per cent sustained injuries requiring treatment.

### 3.3.2 Use of a restraint

The use of seat belts is an obvious factor in the degree of injury that occurs. The introduction of compulsory use of restraints in motor vehicles has had an overwhelming positive impact in reducing road trauma (Robertson 1996). However, Table 3.5 reveals that young males are the group least likely to use a restraint. In part, this neglect of basic safety behaviour may be influenced by peer pressure and the desire to conform to "masculine" traits. In contrast, young female drivers place more emphasis on the use of restraints.

**Table 3.5: use of restraint (per cent)**

Restraint	Males 16-26yrs	Females 16-26yrs	All drivers
Restraint (yes)	68.3	93.4	78.3
Base count	4399	2263	18468

### 3.3.3 Stated top speed

Speed is generally regarded as one of the main causal factors in road traffic accidents. Yet in terms of speed, the data in Table 3.6 suggests that speed is not a factor in the accidents that have occurred in the Hunter RTA Region. For all drivers the most frequently stated top speed was 60 km. Indeed, a substantial number of controllers reported a speed that reflected legal speed limits in New South Wales. Leaving aside issues as to whether the legal speed was a safe speed in the circumstances of the accident, the data on recorded speed contradicts the notion that speed is a factor in road traffic accidents. However, further investigation of the statistics suggests another explanation for this unexpected finding. Although the percentages for “unknown” are not greater than the stated 60 km speed, they are significant. To some extent one can speculate (but not infer) that ‘unknown speed’ involved excessive speed.

**Table 3.6: stated top speed (per cent)**

Speed	Males 16-26yrs	Females 16-26yrs	All drivers
60 kmh	18.8	16.0	13.18
80 kmh	9.5	7.7	6.76
100 kmh	4.8	3.5	3.32
Unknown	17.4	10.9	11.49
Base (count)	4399	2263	18468

Similarly, the main stated Top Speed for males is 60 kmh (Table 3.7). Surprisingly, 18 year old males who were identified in Figure 3.2 as the age group with the greatest likelihood of being involved in an accident recorded the highest percent for travelling at 60 kilometres per hour. Again, it is necessary to assess the importance of the ‘unknown’ factor. If one examines unknown speed for young males by age with degree of crash (Table 3.4) the relationship is most marked. Especially in regard to fatal injuries. The correlation between these two variables is most significant for 19 and 21 year olds. To this extent the speculation that unknown speed involves excessive speed is given credibility.

**Table 3.7: stated top speed - males aged 16-26 years (per cent)**

Speed (km)	16yrs	17yrs	18yrs	19yrs	20yrs	21yrs	22yrs	23yrs	24yrs	25yrs	26yrs
60	0.3	2.3	<b>2.8</b>	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.8	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.2
80	0.3	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.4
100	0.1	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.5
Unknown	0.4	2.1	2.0	<b>2.8</b>	1.5	<b>2.3</b>	1.1	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.0

### 3.3.4 Error factor

Although speed is consistently quoted as being a major factor in traffic accidents, an examination of the data in relation to Error Factor infers that excessive speed is only responsible for a relatively low number of accidents (Table 3.8). Young male drivers are more likely to drive at excessive speeds than all other drivers. Conversely, young females, as a group, are the least likely to engage in excessive speeding practices. In contrast to males, young females disobey traffic signs more frequently. Loss of control (which could imply an inappropriate speed) is common for males and females aged between 16 and 26 years. From this analysis it can be concluded that the lack of driving experience plays a big factor in such statistics. There is no discernible difference between the three groups in regard to unknown error factor

**Table 3.8: error factor (per cent)**

Error	Males 16-26yrs	Females 16-26yrs	All drivers
Disobey traffic signal	3.3	5.4	5.6
Excessive speed	1.5	0.1	0.4
Loss of control	18.3	14.6	12.1
Unknown	67.4	72.6	73.7
Base (count)	4399	2263	18468

An examination of Table 3.9 (Error factor for males by age) shows that excessive speed is fairly uniform across all ages. On the otherhand, loss of control is more likely to be noted as an error factor for those aged between 17 and 19 years. Unequivocally, driving inexperience plays a major factor in these statistics. Again the 'unknown' factor is significant for those drivers aged 18 and 19 years of age.

**Table 3.9: error factor - males aged 16-26 years (per cent)**

Error	16yrs	17yrs	18yrs	19yrs	20yrs	21yrs	22yrs	23yrs	24yrs	25yr s	26yr s
Excessive speed	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0
Disobey traffic signal	0.1	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.3		0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1
Loss of control	0.5	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.5</b>	2.1	1.9	1.5	1.4	1.1	0.8	0.9
Unknown	2.7	7.4	<b>8.7</b>	<b>8.3</b>	7.1	6.8	6.2	5.5	5.1	4.9	4.7

### 3.4 Other contributory factors

Bad weather conditions, poor lighting and alignment of the road are often assumed to be contributory factors in road traffic accidents.

#### 3.4.1 Alignment of road

The Factor Analysis results indicated that the alignment of the road was highly significant. Accordingly, Table 3.10 demonstrates that around 70 per cent of accidents occur on straight roads. Intuitively, one would assume accidents on straight roads would imply that speed is a factor, but as noted in Table 3.6 excessive speed is not identified as a major cause of accidents. Instead it can be assumed that straight roads may encourage passing in adverse conditions. In contrast to young female drivers and all other drivers, young male drivers are more likely to have accidents on winding



roads (Table 3.11). But the divergence from the norm is not marked. A comparable study between Table 3.9 (Error factor) with Table 3.11 reinforces the suggestion that males with limited driving experience are most at risk at losing control of their vehicle especially on winding roads. However, all males aged between 16 and 26 years encounter greater difficulty with winding roads than other drivers.

**Table 3.10: alignment of road (per cent)**

Alignment	Males 16-26yrs	Females 16-26yrs	All drivers
Straight	62.7	68.9	69.5
Curved	37.2	30.9	30.5
Base (count)	4399	2263	18468

**Table 3.11: alignment of road - males aged 16-26 years (per cent)**

Alignment	16yrs	17yrs	18yrs	19yrs	20yrs	21yrs	22yrs	23yrs	24yrs	25yrs	26yrs
Straight	67.3	59.4	64.4	59.2	60.1	61.8	69.4	64.6	56.4	68.2	64.8
Curved	32.7	<b>40.6</b>	35.3	<b>40.8</b>	<b>39.9</b>	38.2	30.6	35.4	<b>43.6</b>	31.5	35.2

### 3.4.2 Natural light conditions

Close to 70 per cent of all motor vehicle accidents occur in daylight (Table 3.12). Young male drivers have a greater likelihood of being involved in an accident during hours of darkness than any other drivers. Table 3.13 shows that males aged 18 years, followed by 19 year olds (the age group most at risk) dominate the accidents that occur in darkness.

**Table 3.12: natural light (per cent)**

Natural light	Males 16-26yrs	Females 16-26yrs	All drivers
Daylight	53.4	65.2	68.9
Darkness	39.8	28.8	25.3
Base (count)	4339	2263	18468

**Table 3.13: natural light - males aged 16-26 years (per cent)**

Natural light	16yrs	17yrs	18yrs	19yrs	20yrs	21yrs	22yrs	23yrs	24yrs	25yrs	26yrs
Dawn	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2
Day light	2.2	6.4	6.6	7.0	5.7	4.8	4.9	4.8	3.7	3.6	3.8
Dusk	0.2	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4
Darkness	1.4	4.6	<b>5.8</b>	<b>4.8</b>	4.4	4.6	3.6	3.2	2.8	2.5	2.1
Total	3.8	12.0	13.5	12.7	10.7	9.9	9.2	8.3	7.0	6.5	6.5

### 3.4.3 Day of the week

Table 3.14 reveals that almost 48 per cent of accidents for all drivers occur over a weekend. For all groups, the day most likely to have an accident is a Saturday. With a percentage rate of 54.3 per cent young male drivers are substantial more likely to be involved in an accident at weekends. In comparison, the young female rate of 48 per cent differs only marginally from the general trend.

**Table 3.14: crash day (per cent)**

Crashday	Males 16-26yrs	Females 16-26yrs	All drivers
Friday	15.9	16.7	16.5
Saturday	20.8	17.6	17.1
Sunday	17.6	13.7	14.3
Base (count)	4339	2263	18468

As Table 3.14 indicates over 20 per cent of young males' accidents occurs on a Saturday. Further analysis by age (Table 3.15) shows that 18 and 19 year olds are the group most likely to be involved in Saturday accidents. Considering that their accidents occur in hours of darkness (Table 3.13) suggests that alcohol or recreational drugs may be involved.

**Table 3.15: crash day - males aged 16-26 years (per cent)**

Crash Day	16yrs	17yrs	18yrs	19yrs	20yrs	21yrs	22yrs	23yrs	24yrs	25yrs	26yrs
Fri	0.6	2.1	2.1	1.7	2.0	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.1	1.0	1.3
Sat	0.6	2.3	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.1</b>	2.4	2.4	1.9	1.5	1.2	1.5	1.0
Sun	0.6	1.8	1.9	2.2	2.1	2.1	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.1	0.8

**Table 3.16: Years of experience for males aged 16-26 years**

Years of Driving Experience	Percentage
0 - 3 Years	51.3
4 - 6 Years	21.7
> 6 Years	12.3

\* 14.7% Unknown

**Table 3.17: Type of Licence for males aged 16-26 years**

Type of Licence	Percentage
Learner	5.2
Provisional	19.8
Standard	62.2
No valid licence	8.9

\* 3.9% Unknown

### 3.5 Conclusion: those at risk: the young male driver

There are clear demographic distinctions between who is involved in road vehicle accidents. Age and gender are the significant factors that influences a person's involvement in road traffic accidents. Although males of all ages make a major contribution to road traffic accident data, young males are most at risk. Moreover, it is evident from the above analysis that males aged between 17 and 19 are

disproportionately represented as the controller in all variables. Table 3.16 confirms that in excess of 50 per cent of young drivers involved in accidents have had less than three years experience. More alarming, is that some 62 per cent had a standard licence (Table 3 17). To be so strongly represented in road traffic accident data shortly after attaining the required driving standards demands further attention.

FIG. 3.1 MALE AND FEMALE CONTROLLERS 0-90 YEARS

Hunter Region

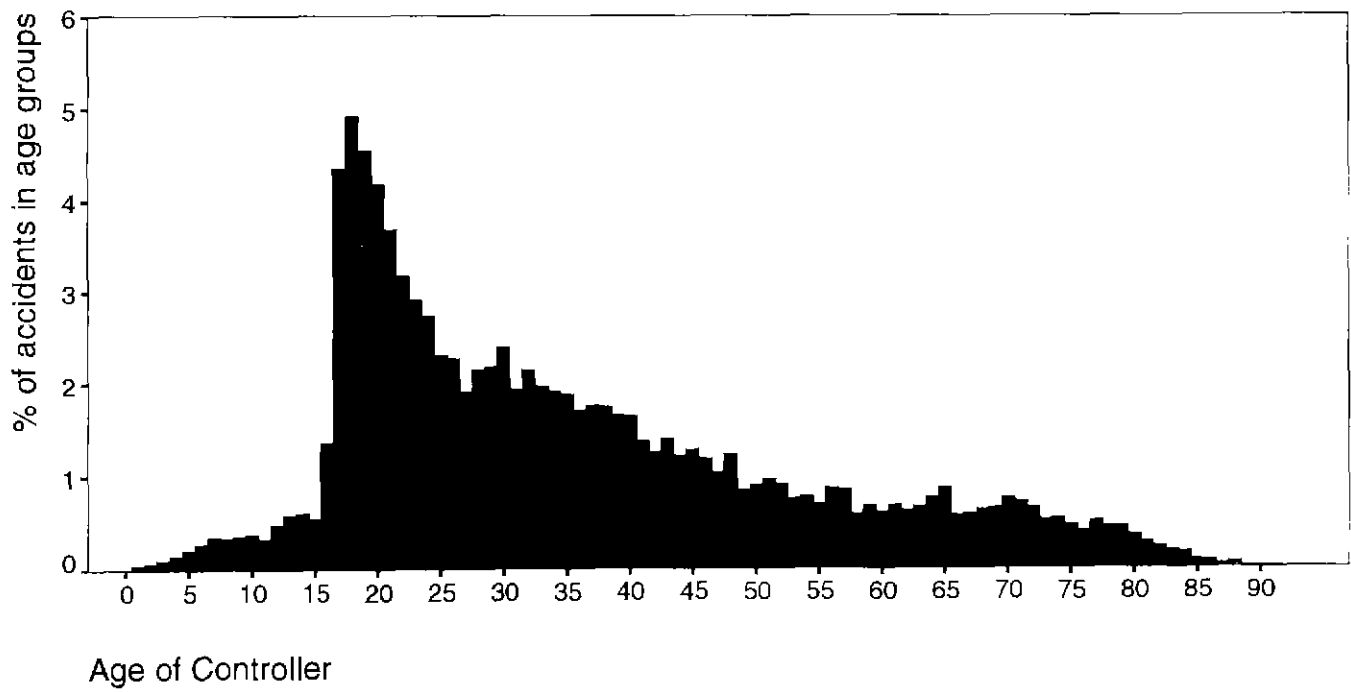


FIG. 3.2 MALE CONTROLLERS AGED 16-26 YEARS

Hunter Region

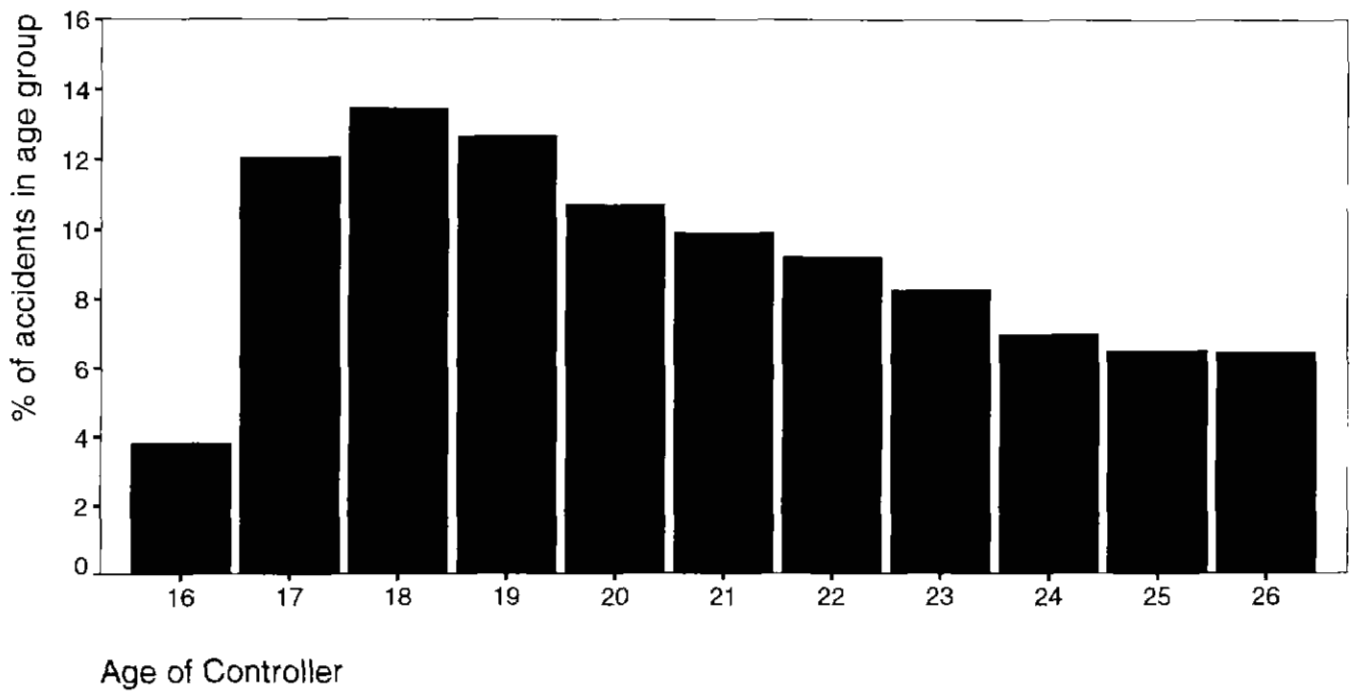
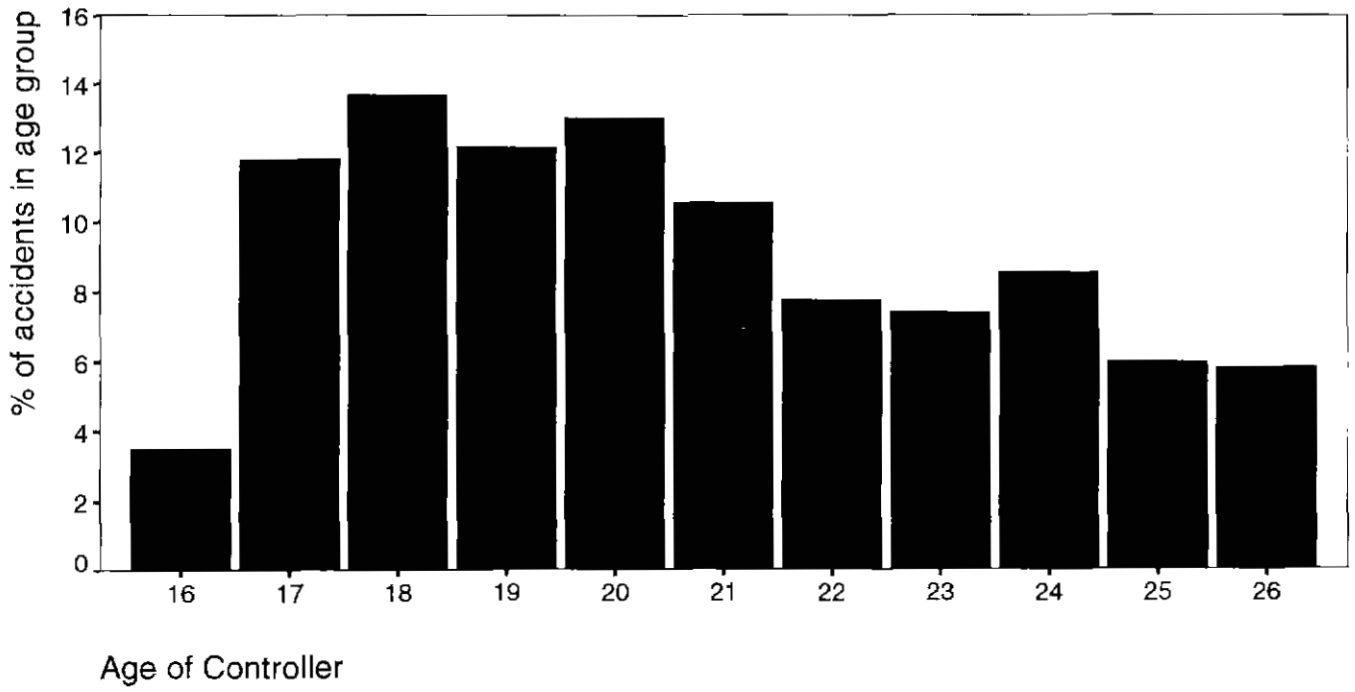


FIG. 3.3 FEMALE CONTROLLERS AGED 16-26 YEARS

Hunter Region



## CHAPTER FOUR

### QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The discussion in the previous chapter, with its description of the profile of young males' involvement in road traffic accidents raises questions about causal processes that influences young male drivers' vulnerability. These questions will be explored through two of the research objectives, namely:

- an investigation into the relationship between young males' attitudes towards driver education and driving practices; and
- identification of how the social construction of masculinity influences driving behaviour.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the data for this analysis was collected through the distribution of a questionnaire survey to males aged 16 to 26 years of age. With the exception of some High School students from Cessnock and Maitland, the young men who participated in this research were overwhelmingly residents of Newcastle. As the research aimed to incorporate young males from all socio-economic backgrounds questionnaires were distributed through various institutions. Accessing young males outside of educational institutions proved problematic. Response rates from Youth Access Newcastle, (YAN) a government sponsored organisation servicing young people was extremely low. Subsequently, a modified questionnaire/interview schedule was conducted with 49 young male drivers who spend their weekends 'cruising' around the Newcastle foreshore area. Because of the modification of the questionnaire, as explained in Chapter Two some of the questionnaire survey questions were not included. On the otherhand, the respondents were asked to comment on many of the open-ended questions from the original questionnaire. It should be noted that some respondents recorded more than one response to a single question and conversely other questions were left unanswered. Table 4.1. details the percentage rate of participation from the groups selected for this research.

**Table 4.1:survey respondents**

Institution	Total No	per cent
TAFE	181	36.4
Uni of Newcastle	113	22.7
Selected High Schools	140	28.2
Youth Access	14	2.9
Foreshore youths	49	9.8
Total	497	100

The primary focus of the questionnaire was on the development of perceived driving ability and young males' attitudes to road safety campaigns. The survey questionnaire covered a broad range of topics. The major part of the questionnaire was concerned with the respondents driving experience, their evaluation of road safety messages and

their perception concerning road safety and their driving ability. Respondents were prompted to add further comments on many of the questions and issues raised.

## 4.2 A demographic overview of survey respondents

The last part of the questionnaire was concerned with a range of general demographic and status information.

### 4.2.1 Survey question 15: age of respondents

Due to the inclusion of High School students, the proportion of respondents in the younger age brackets was high. As Table 4.2 indicates, more than 47 per cent were aged 16 to 18 years, and over 83 per cent were 21 years or younger. It would have been advantageous to have had an equal participation rate with the older categories to determine attitudinal changes over time. However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, those aged between 17 and 19 are the most vulnerable drivers on the Hunter RTA region roads. Gaining an insight into the attitudes of the younger age group is perhaps more imperative.

**Table 4.2: age of respondents(per cent)**

Age	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	F/shore
16-18	47.17	37.33	11.61	97.12	28.57	26.53
19-21	36.28	62.00	53.57	1.44	35.71	42.86
22-24	11.79	11.33	28.57	-	21.43	24.49
25-26	4.31	4.67	6.25	1.44	21.43	6.12

### 4.2.2 Survey questions 16 and 17: marital status and type of household

Due to the age of the respondents, they tended to be single (around 90 per cent) and approximately 67 per cent lived at home with their families (Tables 4.3. and 4.4). This trend is interesting as it can be assumed that parents may have some influence on their son's driving attitudes. University students were more likely to live in shared households with TAFE students more likely to live in a single parent household.

**Table 4.3: marital status (per cent)**

Status	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	F/shore
Single	89.09	85.06	88.39	94.96	92.86	-
Married	3.64	5.75	1.79	2.88	-	-
Partner	6.82	9.20	8.39	2.16	7.14	-

**Table 4.4: type of household (per cent)**

Household	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	F/shore
Single parent	8.43	11.49	5.36	7.19	7.96	-
Family	66.97	65.52	44.64	87.77	61.54	-
Couple	4.78	5.75	7.14	2.16	-	-
Shared h/hold	15.95	14.37	33.04	2.88	30.77	-
Other	3.87	2.87	9.82	-	7.96	-



### 4.2.3 Survey question 18: socio-economic status

One of the key objectives of this research was to determine if socio-economic status had any influence on driving behaviour and attitude towards road safety education. Understandably the vast majority of respondents were either full or part-time students. It should be noted that many tertiary students undertake full-time and part-time employment. As Table 4.5 confirms the considerable difficulties contacting unemployed youth in Newcastle. Indeed, unemployment rates were low, even for the Youth Access group (YAN). As previously noted, returned surveys from this source only numbered 14, and two thirds of these indicated that they were students.

**Table 4.5: employment status of respondent (percent)**

Status	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	F/shore
Student f/t	83.39	44.26	86.24	99.25	66.77	50.00
Student p/t	16.29	54.10	13.76	-	-	50.00
Empl (f/t)	49.46	79.19	17.31	4.55	33.33	-
Empl (p/t)	38.71	11.41	73.08	-	-	-
Unempl	11.83	9.40	9.62	-	-	6.82

In relation to Table 4.6 respondents were asked to note their mother and father's occupation. Their responses were grouped either by blue collar (Tradespersons and Manufacturing) or white collar (Managerial, Professional and Clerical) occupations. The fathers of TAFE students were more likely to be employed in a blue collar occupations. Although mothers were employed across a wide range of occupations the decidedly high response of around a third for mothers engaged in household duties determined that only this category was noted. Interestingly, the mothers of university students were more likely to be in the paid labour force than any other group. As many university students parental home is outside of the Newcastle region, this trend could reflect the shortage of employment opportunities for females in the Newcastle region, which has traditionally been a region of heavy (male) manufacturing industries. Again it should be emphasised that the low participation rate from the YAN group tends to distort the per cent response.

**Table 4.6: employment status of respondents' parents (per cent)**

Status	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	F/shore
Mother (Household)	28.49	31.65	17.89	31.45	46.15	-
Father (White collar)	41.73	28.67	49.47	48.00	66.66	-
Father (Blue collar)	39.03	57.35	26.31	29.60	33.33	-

### 4.3 Driving experience

The first part of the questionnaire survey asked respondents to answer a range of questions that related to their driving experience and factors that influenced their early driving behaviour.

### 4.3.1 Survey question 1: current driving situation of respondents

Respondents were asked:

*What is your current driving situation*

As it was assumed that some males may hold more than one licence they were asked to tick the appropriate box(es).

**Table 4.7: current driving situation of respondents (per cent)**

Type of licence	All	TAFE	UNI	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
No Experience	5.39	5.59	0.91	7.80	14.29	-
Learners Permit	19.78	10.61	4.55	43.97	14.29	6.25
Provisional Licence	13.48	10.61	3.64	25.53	7.14	10.42
Full licence 1-2 yrs	25.17	31.84	30.91	11.35	21.43	35.42
Full licence 2 -4 yrs	17.53	21.23	35.45	-	-	20.83
Full licence 4-6 yrs	6.74	6.15	13.64	0.71	21.43	12.50
Full licence > 6 yrs	4.27	3.91	8.18	-	21.43	8.33
Motorcycle	-	0.56	-	-	-	14.58
Heavy vehicle	0.22	0.56	-	-	-	-

Reflecting the young age of the respondents, Table 4.7 shows that the majority of young males that participated in this survey have less than four years driving experience. Understandably, most of the school students that participated in the survey are currently on a learners licence. Leaving aside Youth Access respondents, University students and the Foreshore respondents were the groups that recorded the longest period of driving experience. Foreshore respondents were distinguished from the other groups by acknowledging ownership of motorcycle vehicle licences. Nevertheless, as they were the only group, and their participatory role was low, it can be assumed that obtaining a motor vehicle licence is not prevalent for this age group within the region.

### 4.3.2 Survey question 2: age when respondents acquired a learner's licence

Respondents were asked:

*How old were you when you took out a Learner's permit?*

Table 4.8 indicates that the vast majority of males that participated within the study acquired their Learner's licence at the minimum legal age of 16 years. For all groups only a very small percentage acquire their licence past the age of 18 years. Indeed, the high percentage rate of school students taking up their learner's permit at age 16 years indicates an increasing trend for males to start learning to drive at 16 years.

**Table 4.8: age at which learner's licence was acquired (per cent)**

Age	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
16	78.08	72.88	77.88	86.47	90.91	76.60
17	15.07	18.08	13.27	10.53	45.45	14.89
18	4.57	5.08	6.19	3.01	-	6.38
19	0.91	2.26	-	-	-	2.13
20>	1.37	1.69	2.65	-	-	-

### 4.3.3 Survey question 3: motivation for obtaining a learner's licence

Respondents were asked:

*What were the most important factors that prompted you to you to get your learner's licence?*

From a list of factors the respondents were asked give each factor a rating out of 5 - with a score of 0 representing little or no importance, to a score of 5 being very important. The factors listed included; social pressure; encouragement from parents; independence; employment; and 'other'. The respondents were then asked to note which one was the most important. Table 4.9 records the most influential factor for obtaining a learner's licence. The need for independence was a deciding factor for all groups. The second most stated reason was 'other'. This last factor was generally noted as being "I just wanted to learn to drive", "I loved playing around with cars", "I wanted to go cruising" or for pragmatic reasons such as the lack of public transport within their area. Independence was also equated to overcoming public transportation problems. One university student who had given zero scores to all factors except Independence which he rated 5, noted "I come from Forster, and in Forster there is nothing to do unless you have money and transport - public transport is non-existent in Forster."

**Table 4.9: most important factor for obtaining a learner's licence (per cent)**

Factor	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
Social	10.53	7.87	15.29	11.11	-	-
Parents	3.70	3.94	-	7.07	-	-
Independence	52.01	44.88	61.18	51.52	72.73	-
Employment	13.62	24.41	3.53	5.05	18.18	-
Other	18.89	17.32	18.82	22.22	9.09	-

In general, TAFE students and the group from Youth Access rated employment opportunities as the second most significant factor. University and school students gave more importance to social pressure over the employment factor. The least influential factor was the role of their parents. It would be wrong to suggest that parents give very little encouragement to their sons to take up driving, instead the other factors have a greater influence on males' motivation in learning to drive.

As noted above, the motivation for learning for males to drive came from a strong desire for independence. One university student noted that "learning to drive is the next important step to being an adult." For many respondents being able to drive enabled them "to break free from home." Or as another TAFE student summed up his decision to take out a learner's licence, it gave him the freedom "to get away from the house, to have fun, to get a job." Although 'independence' was most often defined in terms of social and economic activities, nonetheless, there was a clear perceived link between obtaining a learner's licence and the transition from childhood to adulthood.

#### 4.3.4 Survey question 4: the most influential person on early driving behaviour

Respondents were asked;

*Who taught you to drive?*

From a list that included their parents; relatives; friends; driving school; and, 'other' the survey participants were asked to tick the box(es) applicable to them. They were then asked to indicate from the list whom they regarded as having the most important influence on their early driving behaviour. Table 4.10 records the person who they considered as having the most significant influence on their driving behaviour.

**Table 4.10: most significant influence on respondents early driving behaviour (per cent)**

Person	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
Father	56.63	59.33	56.31	65.74	30.77	-
Mother	16.33	16.67	14.56	19.44	23.08	-
Relative	6.38	7.33	5.83	7.41	-	-
Friend	5.61	5.33	3.88	7.41	15.38	-
Driving Sch	13.01	10.67	18.45	13.89	7.69	-
Other	2.04	0.67	0.97	2.78	23.08	-

Table 4.10 reveals that all young males believe that their fathers had a significant influence on their early driving behaviour. Only University students ranked Driving Schools above their 'Mothers' as being influential. Respondents from Youth Access tended to rate friends and 'other' as being significant factors. Somewhat alarmingly, but fortunately it only applied to a few 'other' was defined as being 'myself'. One respondent noted that he had learnt to drive "bashing around in the bush with my friends." Although parents were not a major factor in the decision to take up driving (Table 4.9) parents, (notably fathers) do play a critical role when it comes to the formation of attitudes towards driving behaviour.

#### 4.3.5 Survey question 5: ownership and modifications of vehicle driven by respondent

Respondents were asked the following questions:

- (a) *Who owns the vehicle that you normally drive?*
- (b) *What type of vehicle is it?*
- (c) *What is the engine size?*
- (d) *Are there any modifications?*

Although question (b) invariably produced responses such as "a Ford" around 90 per cent of vehicles driven by young males are sedans with an engine size of approximately 2000 to 3000 cc. Surprisingly, many respondents left question (c) unanswered or noted down a question mark. This suggests that the size of the engine was for most unimportant. Due to the lack of response and discrepancies in the interpretation of these questions Table 4.10 is only concerned with questions (a) and (b).

**Table 4.11: ownership and modification of vehicle (per cent)**

Vehicle Owner	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
Self	57.82	78.49	65.14	21.71	90.91	-
Parent	38.86	18.60	30.28	75.19	18.18	-
Friend	-	-	-	2.99	-	-
Vehicle Modified	53.19	60.00	48.45	49.51	50.00	-

As would be expected, respondents from High Schools tend to drive their parents' vehicles, and to a limited extent their friends or older siblings. Reflecting the higher participation rate in full time employment, TAFE students were more likely to drive their own vehicles. TAFE students were also more likely to have some form of modifications to their vehicles. However, the term modification was interpreted very broadly. Although the most common modifications was "mag wheels", many listed a wide range of accessories from CD Players to "fluffy dice".

#### 4.3.6 Survey question 6: age at which the respondent first "drove"

Respondents were asked:

*Did you drive a motor vehicle or a motorcycle before you were old enough to hold a learner's licence?*

If their answer was yes they were asked to specify the age and the circumstances.

**Table 4.12: Respondents with underage driving experience (per cent)**

Response	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
Yes	67.19	71.35	61.61	65.69	78.57	-

Close to 70 per cent of all respondents admitted driving vehicles before they were legally old enough. University students were the least likely to have driven before they obtained their learner's licence. Overall, for those that responded in the positive, the average age when they first drove was 9 years. Although many recalled sitting on their "father's laps" as he drove, in general most had driven from a young age on relative's properties, beaches, etc. Indeed, their comments about "paddock bashers" indicated that it was a commonly accepted practice to drive "off road" before being legally old enough to acquire a Learner's Licence.

Although Newcastle is a metropolitan area, it is within easy access to beaches and farming communities. However, the lower per cent rate for school students indicates either a change in attitude towards "off road" driving or limited access to areas where this practice takes place. Interestingly, the father of a 15 year old fatally injured in a "dune buggy" driven by another 15 year old endorsed such behaviour. Speaking after the inquest into his son's death he stated that young males should be given motor vehicle training before they are legally old enough. He went on to note that "country kids in the past knew how to drive well before they got their licences (*The Newcastle Herald* 3.12.96). This statement and the above stated findings raises questions about the legal age for driving. Such questions will be taken up in a later chapter.

#### 4.4: Driving behaviour and attitudes towards road safety campaigns

This final section involves an analysis of attitudes towards road safety campaigns, driving infringements and the respondents' opinions on road safety education. At the end of each structured question, the respondents were asked to make further comments. An analysis of their verbatim responses are included within the discussion.

##### 4.4.1: Survey question 7: the impact of road safety campaigns on driving behaviour

In the first part of question 7 the respondents were asked to consider:

*How important road safety television commercials and road signs were to their driving behaviour.*

They were also asked:

*Do you have any other comments on these or other televised road safety commercials?*

The respondents were asked to give a rating out of 5 for three regular television commercials. These commercials were the "Kombi-van" which shows the crash of a young couple with a heavy vehicle; "a fishing trip" where the aftermath of the accident is watched on the news by the family; and a wife listening to the telephone answering machine following the news of husband's death. They were also asked to rate five road safety slogans commonly advertised in the Newcastle region. Table 4.13 and Figures 4.1. and 4.2 shows the percentage of respondents that gave each category a rank of 5. It should be noted that only the television commercials questions were given to the Foreshore group.

**Table 4.13: importance of television commercials and road safety slogans (per cent)\***

Issue	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
Kombi Van	40.23	43.10	35.71	38.85	57.14	53.33
Fishing trip	25.34	29.48	14.29	27.45	42.86	43.90
Wife/ telephone	24.71	30.06	13.51	27.45	21.43	34.15
Drink-drive/B.Idiot	26.76	34.48	14.16	27.34	28.57	-
Stop, Revive. Survive	22.94	29.41	14.16	21.74	28.57	-
What speed are you going now?	17.58	19.88	10.62	19.42	28.57	-
Rushing home?	5.75	5.85	5.36	5.80	57.69	-
Speed cameras	23.23	25.43	19.47	23.19	28.57	-

\*NB: These percentages indicate those giving a rating of 5 on a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 being the greatest impact.

All respondents were familiar with the televised commercials. The Kombi-van commercial was noted as having the greatest impact on their driving behaviour. As it portrays a young driver, young males were able to personally relate to the driver and the situation. Indeed, one respondent noted "I can relate to the Kombi-van commercial, that exact accident happened to me." Presumably, he meant that he had

fallen asleep at the wheel and had come close to colliding with another vehicle. Another respondent recalled staying up all night to complete an university assignment, then nearly “smashing myself up, when driving into uni to hand it in.” It is interesting that this commercial was not concerned with drink-driving or speed. Yet, the commercial was perceived as realistic and that the ‘accident’ could happen to anyone. In other words, the young male driver was ‘blameless’, but more significantly, driving when tired was widely accepted as common practice among young people.

Some young males obviously related to the graphic nature of many of the commercials. One High School student suggesting that there “should be more of them shown late at night” also argued that they should “show very graphic and disturbing ads designed to scare people into driving sensibly.” A male from Youth Access claimed that “the more horrific the ad the better”. In marked contrast a TAFE student who gave a zero rating for the Kombi-van claimed that “they are shit, scare tactics don’t work, more money should be pumped into driver training rather than silly advertising commercials.”

University students generally tended to be more critical of commercials and questioned their impact on their driving behaviour. In part their attitudes could be influenced by less exposure to television and/or they have developed skills to critique passive messages. Except for the Kombi-van commercial, less than 15 per cent of University students gave the other two commercials a rating of five. One university student claimed “I think that they are alright, but I don’t think about them when I’m driving.” Other males were equally critical of these commercials. A Foreshore respondent noted that the first one was realistic, but the others were not. Referring to the second one he said “no way would a crash be shown on TV before the relatives had been informed.” For the third he said “Why didn’t the lady answer the phone before the police came?” Indeed, from many of their remarks, it was not the message that was at issue but the context. For example a TAFE student criticised a current commercial that depicted a young driver whose speeding killed his sister as being “not real.... I don’t think that my mum would react like that?”

Overall, most males believed that commercials had some impact on their driving. A University student who gave the Kombi-van a score of 5, but gave a rating of three for the other two commercials noted that commercials were “a good reminder that driving can be fatal, and that these accidents may happen to anyone. I am more wary now of others who drive beyond the speed limit (when a passenger).” Such remarks indicate a growing awareness of the dangers of being a passenger, hopefully this respondent was equally aware of the dangers as a driver.

Overall, acceptance of the commercials was strong. One young male from Youth Access stated that they were “very important and should be shown on TV twenty times a day on every channel.” Notwithstanding, that familiarity may counteract the effectiveness of its road safety message, this research shows that passive delivery of driver education through television is effective. Such images reinforce self-notions of their driving ability and there was strong support for messages to be linked to situations that they could relate to and/or for them to be given a credible context.

In the second part of question 7 respondents were asked to consider road signs promoting road safety education and were asked:

*How effective these slogans/messages were in influencing their driving behaviour?*

and

*Do you have any comments about these or other road safety reminders?*

Road safety messages advertised on billboards, buses, radio, etc., had much less impact on young males than the televised commercials (Figure 4.2). The slogan 'Rushing Home? We'll leave a light on for you' depicted with a picture of police patrol car with flashing lights on the side of Newcastle buses was given a ranking of 5 by over 50 per cent of Youth Access respondents. This suggests that they were familiar with it. The first and probably the oldest known slogan 'If you drink and drive,- you're a bloody idiot' was rated 5 by the largest majority. Some considered the wording "stupid" as one male noted "young people are always being called a bloody idiot, so that won't stop people drinking if they want to." The message "what speed are you going now" rated rather low, however, several respondents noted that it made them slow down when they heard that message on the radio when driving. Although not strictly a slogan, signs indicating speed cameras also rated highly in regards to influencing driving behaviour. As one TAFE student astutely noted "that message is a very real disincentive to speeding." A school student remarked that he only slowed down where he knew speed cameras were sited. He added "who cares what speed I'm doing any other time." This remark reveals that cameras play a significant deterrent role. However, it also reveals a lack of understanding of the correlation between speed and dangerous driving.

Again university students tended to be dismissive of the impact that these messages had on their driving behaviour. The respondent that had earlier thought commercials should be shown twenty times a day - was much more critical of roadside safety messages. He argued "I think everyone should feel these slogans have no influence on their driving behaviour as they are only common sense." A respondent from Youth Access noted "I have seen all of these signs but the message they are trying to convey just doesn't seem to register." However, it should be noted that possibly because of television commercials and road signs and the fact that drink-driving has been regarded as unacceptable behaviour during their driving years, nearly all young males readily accept that drink-driving is risky behaviour. Comments like "drink-driving should be cracked down on" was common across all groups. The importance of televised commercials in emphasising the unacceptability of drink-driving is implicit within the statement of a 25 year old university student who claimed that "Ads on speed have no impact on me, but drink-driving ads do reinforce that message. I haven't driven under the influence for a couple of years."

Due to the widely held public concern in recent years of the role of alcohol in accidental death and injury in motor vehicle accidents, young males are receptive to preventative drink-driving messages. The clear acceptance of television, and to a lesser extent radio indicates that these are the best mediums for delivering road safety materials to young males. However, it should be emphasised that the types of media content have differing implications for influencing the direction of attitudes. This will depend on how uniform they portray widely valued attitudes and the consequences of dangerous driving in a context that young males relate to.



#### 4.4.2 Survey question 8: attitudes to road safety initiatives

Respondents were asked to rate a series of statement in relation to road safety. Table 4.14 and Figures 4.3 and 4.4 records the percentage rate from each group that gave the statement 5 out 5.

**Table 4.14: respondents rating of road safety issues**

Issue	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
Driver alertness	72.18	75.29	71.43	69.35	64.29	-
Adjustment to hazards	63.28	65.68	6.25	6.50	57.12	-
Consid. of P and L plates	29.60	31.14	7.14	39.67	21.43	-
Consid. of bicycles and motorcycles	38.85	37.43	11.50	33.61	35.71	-
Compulsory driver ed.	9.51	46.75	7.14	33.40	50.00	-
Visible police presence	40.92	27.81	8.85	28.36	21.43	-
0.02 blood level	29.91	23.70	12.39	39.02	21.43	-
Safety-education road signs	17.09	18.93	33.04	18.70	35.71	-
Defensive driving course	28.05	29.24	45.54	31.75	28.57	-
Minimum age raised	10.77	57.32	36.11	10.83	7.14	-
Minimum aged lowered	13.83	11.46	6.54	24.56	-	-

NB: (per cent giving a rating of 5 on a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 being very important. from selected public and private secondary schools in the Hunter region.

Right across all groups there was little variation in their response to the statement “drivers should always remain alert.” This result is consistent with the Roy Morgan Research (1992) findings that “alertness” was considered the most important driver skill. The next statement, that drivers should adjust their speed to hazards’ such as fog or rain, was only supported by TAFE students and participants from Youth Access. One would presume that being an “alert driver” would encompass driving to the prevailing conditions. Yet, in contradiction to the first statement both University and High School students rated this aspect very low. This indicates either an arrogance (the assumption being, that they are safe drivers) or ignorance of the dangers involved in not adjusting speed to road conditions. As they are the group that are predominantly ‘L’ or ‘P’ plate drivers (Table 4.7) only High School students placed a priority on the statement that drivers should show more consideration to L and P plate drivers. Given that 42.7 per cent of the respondents have been on ‘Full’ licence for less than 4 years one would have thought that they could still relate to the difficulties facing inexperienced drivers. Consideration of bicycles and motorcycle riders rated much higher than for ‘P’ and ‘L’ plate drivers. However, University students rated this much lower than the other groups. Similarly, University students gave a low rating for the suggestion that driver education should be compulsory for all young drivers. TAFE students and Youth Access respondents were most noticeable in favour of this proposal, and to a lesser extent school students.

School students were more in favour to the suggestion that “there should be a greater visible presence of police on the roads” than the other groups. Though many individual males from the other groups, notably the Foreshore group that commented that the

police had “a very powerful impact on slowing traffic down.” In relation to the statement that “a blood alcohol level of 0.02 per cent should apply to all drivers,” school students were again very supportive. In New South Wales, drivers on ‘L’ and ‘P’ licences and those aged under 25 years who have held their ‘Full’ licence for less than three years must stay below 0.2 per cent. In other words, these findings suggest that school students were more likely to accept changes to the current legal alcohol limit than the older age groups. In sharp contrast to their attitude towards actual road signs (Figure 4.2) promoting road safety, a greater percentage of University students gave this statement a rating of five than any other group. University students were also much more in favour of the introduction of defensive driving courses for all drivers. As seventy one per cent of TAFE respondents drove before holding a licence it is rather ironic that they were more in favour of raising the minimum age for holding a licence than any other group. With the exception of school students, who least supported the raising of the age, the vast majority from all groups suggested 18 years as a minimum age. Not surprisingly, school students more than any other group agreed with the statement in favour of having the minimum age lowered for holding a licence with many suggesting 15 years.

In the last section of question 8 the questionnaire respondents were asked:

*Do you have any other comments about ways to improve road safety?*

Their comments were divided between grievances about other drivers and/or the police; a reiteration of the above statements; the importance of television commercials; and, more importantly some very valid suggestions. Leaving aside remarks that the “police have too much power” and that road safety would be improved immensely if “women and old men in hats got off the roads,” other comments indicated that many young drivers had given serious consideration to the question of road safety. More significantly, their suggestions were uniformly shared between all groups. Three common shared themes were identified from their comments. These included the need to improve roads; tighter restrictions on younger drivers; and the implementation of driver education for all motorists.

The first was stated very bluntly “improve the roads” but the second two issues involved more detailed descriptions of ways to facilitate their suggestions. It was interesting to note the regard that ‘older’ males from the non-School group, especially those aged between 22 and 24 years had towards the driving behaviour of younger drivers. Many of them perceived young drivers as being inexperienced and subsequently, being most at risk on the roads. Consistent with these perceptions a common comment from many participants from the University, TAFE, Youth Access and the Foreshore was the ease at which young people can gain a drivers’ licence. “An eye test, a three point turn and reverse park is just too easy” stated one university student. Many suggested more rigorous driver training and greater restrictions for ‘L’ and ‘P’ plate drivers. The restrictions noted ranged from extending the qualification period for gaining ‘P’ plate and Full Licences to restricting engine size. “Less power, less speed, less chance of being killed or killing” stated a Youth Access respondent. Another suggestion was restrict “young people, eg. ‘L’ and ‘P’ Plates having passengers, especially on a Friday and Saturday night. “Without their mates, there won’t be any peer-pressure to hoon” noted one University student.

Overall, the most noted comment concerning young drivers focused on the lack of driver education in promoting awareness of hazardous driving behaviour. Many respondents called for the introduction of compulsory defensive driving courses; "driver education as a school subject"; and "showing films of road accidents." Underlying this concern for young drivers was the recognition by 'older' male respondents that driver education was a low priority when gaining a licence. Consequently, it was widely perceived that young males were ill-equipped to deal with life threatening situations. "All young drivers should be put on a skid pan and taught how to get out of a difficult situation" claimed one TAFE student. Figure 4.4 shows university students were more likely than all other groups to support defensive driving course. However, one University student who had undertaken a defensive driving courses noted that it was not necessarily a panacea. He explained that "defensive driving training on its own is useless and in my experience they seem to promote dangerous driving. The course I did basically boosted confidence to a level beyond ability." The concern and suggestions relating to young drivers, notably from the University and TAFE groups were consistent with their responses to the statement that the minimum age for holding a licence should be raised (Figure 4.4). There was a clear recognition of the dangers inherent to young inexperienced drivers by non-school 'older' respondents.

The third theme of improving driver education at a general level was noted by all groups. There was a general perception held by most young males that bad driving behaviour was not necessarily the prerogative of the young. Bad drivers were inevitably categorised as those who either drove under the speed limit or negotiated roundabouts incorrectly. There were numerous claims that "people should be made to travel at the speed limit, not 15-20 km. below which frustrates drivers and encourage them to take risks to get past," and "it is still common to witness people unable to correctly use roundabouts". There was also general agreement that the police did not enforce good driving behaviour because of their focus on speed. It was perceived that because "Police seem to concentrate on speeders," they ignore minor offences but it was "the minor offences that make people annoyed and aggravated which causes accidents." More significantly, another respondent argued that the concentration on "speed as a revenue raiser" actually encouraged speeding. He explained that "if less tickets were handed out, speeding would become something to be ashamed of (like drink-driving) instead of saying you got caught". This comment is notable in that it reinforces the earlier noted attitude of young drivers towards drink-driving. It also demonstrates the expectation and acceptance by young drivers to be "booked" for speeding offences.

Young drivers overwhelmingly perceived that they were "more up-to-date with traffic regulations" than the general public. This self-notion of driving knowledge and the apparent disregard by the police of misdemeanours of older drivers promoted a perceived 'conflict' between young male drivers and other road users. Many young drivers believed that they were being unnecessarily targeted by police while other drivers, "because they are older", were being encouraged to persist in bad driving practices. "The laws should apply to all drivers. so why don't the police enforce them" noted a Foreshore respondent. More serious was the blatant antagonism between young drivers and the Police. One University student aged 18 years noted "I lost 2 points and gained a \$100 fine after I was followed in my car for approx. 4 kms. they

then proceeded to try and defect my car, once they realised they couldn't, they told then that I had not indicated at the last corner, which a friend could confirm that I did. Just because I have a 'cop-magnet' car does not mean I am a 'hoon' driver."

Consistent with this perception, there was strong support for stricter monitoring of what they perceived as poor driving practices by other drivers. Indeed, the perceived lack of coordinated and concentrated police effort against all drivers prompted one respondent to recommend a "dob in a bad driver campaign." He noted that there should be "a free call complaint line where you leave the licence plate number of someone driving dangerously. Police could use this as a cross-reference, especially if someone has lots of complaints against them." There were numerous calls to introduce on-going driver education. Although many believed that re-testing should begin at either 40 or 50 years of age, one respondent suggested "regular practical and theoretical testing for all drivers throughout the life of the driver." Another reiterating this comment was more specific and noted that "all people should be retested for licences every 5 years."

Young drivers believe that they are being targeted by the police to the detriment of promoting good driving behaviour for all drivers. The above analysis reveals the development of road-safety attitudes within the minds of many young male drivers. This finding gives cause for some optimism. However, unless their suggestions are given some consideration by policy makers their awareness and acceptance of increased surveillance of drivers' ability may lapse as they progress into becoming one of the "older drivers" that they presume drive relatively unimpeded by police.

#### 4.4.3 Survey question 9: traffic infringement penalties.

Respondents were asked:

*While you have been driving have you experienced any one of the following -*

- 1) *A fine*
- 2) *Loss of points*
- 3) *Loss of licence*

**Table 4.15: traffic penalties incurred by respondents (per cent)**

PENALTY	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
Fine	41.12	59.67	44.74	12.00	53.33	77.55
Loss of points	34.16	51.93	34.21	9.00	40.00	69.39
loss of licence	9.66	16.02	6.14	4.00	6.67	26.53

Table 4.15 demonstrates why young male drivers' believe that police discriminate against them. With the exception of school students, around forty per cent of the respondents in this survey had experienced a fine and/or loss of points. Compared to the other groups the Foreshore group were the group most likely to lose their licence. The most commonly given reason for incurring loss of points and a fine was speeding, not displaying 'P' Plates and negligent driving (usually involving an accident). Loss of Licence was generally related Driving Under the Influence (DUI). The vast majority were totally against drink-driving. A respondent from the Foreshore argued that the

“Blood Alcohol Limit should be 0.000” and that drivers “should not take any sort of drugs at all.”

Speeding far out weighed any other reason. Indeed, it would seem that driving without ‘P’ Plates was in order to drive at the legal limit for ‘other’ drivers without attracting the attention of the Police. In regards to speeding, many respondents admitted to several offences. Indeed, although some complained that “other drivers” were going faster than them, many others took some pride in recording individually where the offence took place and at what speed they had been travelling. More worrying was the fact that the majority perceived that speeding was not engaging in risky or dangerous behaviour. “Speeding is alright in moderation” noted a TAFE student.

#### 4.4.4 Survey Question 10: responses to traffic penalties

Respondents were given a range of responses and asked to rate out of five the factor that best described what they experienced following the penalty. Table 4.16 shows the factor noted as ‘inconvenience’ being the most significant. Inconvenience was generally noted within economic terms. Understandably, due to their limited financial resources, the payment of fines was considered by many as an economic burden. For University and School students personal feelings ranked more highly. These feelings were generally specified as “anger” though a few noted that they felt “guilty” and even “embarrassed.” Invariably anger was directed against the Police for using “speed as a revenue raiser.” It is interesting to note that only School students noted that “peer pressure” was of any significance. More alarming is the fact that with the exception of TAFE students very few respondents thought that the experience made them “become more careful.” Given that around 65 per cent of the respondents live at home, it is surprising that only TAFE students noted any parental disapproval. Indeed some were fairly complacent and noted that losing points and/or receiving a fine did not bother them. Finally, “Other” tended to be interpreted as financial and again many noted that the police was using them for revenue raising purposes. Some had obviously developed skills in overcoming this inconvenience. Several University students noted that a letter explaining the circumstances could result in a caution and the fine being reimbursed.

**Table 4.16: responses to driving penalties (per cent)**

Response	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
Inconvenience	41.46	50.00	36.84	20.00	12.50	-
Peer pressure	3.25	3.13	-	13.33	-	-
Parental disapproval	3.25	6.25	-	-	-	-
Personal feelings	25.20	15.63	52.63	40.00	12.50	-
More care	10.57	15.63	5.26	6.67	-	-
No response	4.88	1.56	7.89	6.67	6.25	-
Other	11.38	7.81	15.79	13.33	6.25	-

The high incidence rate of traffic infringement penalties among the respondents (Table 4.14) tends to negate the seriousness of the offence. The overall perception of young males towards speeding is that it is acceptable behaviour. Subsequently, police

enforcement of legal regulation is seen more as an inconvenience than as a means of deterrence.

As noted, the results of Tables 4.15 and 4.16 tend to reflect a general presumption by young males that “speeding” is a normal driving practice. A persistent theme throughout their verbatim responses in relation to driving penalties focussed on the relevance of existing speed limits. There were many suggestions that the minimum speed limit should be raised to 70 km and many saw “no justification for speed limits on major roads.” The Foreshore group were particularly vocal in their attitudes towards the police curtailing speeding. Many of them saw speeding as a way to gain driving skills. There were numerous suggestions from this group that areas should be designated where young male drivers can legally speed. “Most people do it any way, so it should be legalised” stated one Foreshore respondent. Another male interviewed at the Foreshore claimed that “I drive fast ... if places were provided off road, I wouldn’t have to do it on the road.” Indeed, it was suggested that the Police would “raise more revenue” from charging five dollars for the privilege of speeding in controlled areas.

The final two questions in this section referred to their involvement in traffic accidents and asked for their perception on the major causes of road traffic accidents.

#### 4.4.5 Survey question 11: involvement in accident

Respondents were asked:

*Have you as a driver or as a passenger ever been involved in an accident?*

**Table 4. 17 respondent involvement in a motor vehicle accident (per cent)**

	All	TAFE	Uni	Schools	YAN	Foreshore
Accident	63.57	69.77	70.27	49.62	71.43	-
Injury	29.77	34.32	33.93	19.26	46.15	-

Perhaps indicative of their inclination towards speed, with the exception of the younger School students, around 70 per cent of the other males that participated in this survey had been involved in an accident (Table 4.17). Of those that affirmed their involvement, around one third of the accidents had resulted in an injury for the driver and/or passengers.

Respondents were asked:

*What caused the accident?*

Although for many respondents, “stupid women” and “silly old men” seemed to be the cause of their accidents, many others noted factors such as speed, loss of concentration, wet roads, etc. Many respondents blamed their accidents on other motorists, notably women and old men who had generally stopped in front of them, without “allowing enough time” for them “to get around”. Therefore speed was often an unrecognised factor. “A tree” and “my dog” was also held responsible for two other accidents.

Continuing with Question 11, respondents were asked:

*Did you change your driving behaviour following the accident?*

Unless they perceived themselves as being at fault and/or they were the actual driver at the time of the accident they were reluctant to change their driving behaviour. One respondent who had been a passenger in a vehicle that hit a post on the side of the road replied “no, because I was in a mini bus that was rented and a school teacher was driving.” Another respondent had been involved in two accidents. The first he blamed on “bad weather” and the second was caused by the “other party being under the influence of medication.” He noted rather indignantly that he had not changed his driving behaviour because “neither accident was caused by my driving.” Even when they acknowledged fault they did not readily admit to changing their behaviour. A University student who had recorded that the accident had been caused because he “was half asleep” noted that he did not change his driving behaviour because “it was a small impact into a small post, so it didn’t really affect by confidence”.

#### **4.4.6 Survey Question 12: perception of the main causes of traffic accidents**

This was an open ended question which asked respondents:

*What do you think are the main causes of traffic accidents?*

Across all the groups there was general agreement on the major causes of accidents. Again, “women and old men in hats” and “Volvo drivers” were overly represented as the main causes. None of the respondents identified the behaviour of young drivers *per se* as the cause. However, several respondents linked the driving behaviour of the older motorist with the negative driving behaviour of the young. “Old people who are indecisive and don’t drive at the speed limit frustrating younger more aggressive drivers and this promotes risk” noted one respondent. Overall, the majority highlighted a wide range of issues. The major and most noted factors in order of importance were drink-driving, impatience, lack of experience, being distracted, fatigue, and speed. Many of their comments reiterated earlier comments regarding defensive driving, improving the conditions of roads and the lack of driving education for the general public. For example, one respondent believed that accidents were caused by “people who have had their licence for say 20 years and are not up to date with current driving standards.” This statement reveals the attitude of many young drivers, that they are at the cutting edge of driving knowledge. There was almost a presumption that this knowledge on road rules gave them a protective armour. Although many were aware of the dangers of inexperience, very few recognise the negative impact that inexperience may have on their driving behaviour. It is also interesting that many recognise that speed is a leading factor in road accidents, but many of them clearly drive with the belief that they are ‘invincible’ due to “their quick reflexes.”

Some respondents were particularly perceptive and revealed a depth of understanding into the dangers of driving. One male noted that the main cause of traffic accidents was that “people did not understand that a car is a deadly weapon and not just a mode of transport.” On the otherhand a feeling emerged from their responses of the inevitability of motor vehicle accidents. As one person stated, “with tons of metal zooming about controlled by fallible humans, the law of probability dictates that they will happen. As long the population continues to drive accidents will happen regularly.”

#### **4.4.7 Survey question 13: attitudes to young drivers' involvement in traffic accidents.**

Respondents were informed that drivers aged under 26 years of age are most at risk of being involved in an accident. They were asked:

*Do you have any comments on this statement in relation to your own driving ability?*

Overwhelmingly, the respondents in this survey questioned the validity of this statement or denied applicability to themselves. Consistent with the perception of denial were statements like - "this is a law which has been enforced due to statistics. These statistics are taken from areas where the population is mainly young males, thus the enforcing agencies get their desired results." Similarly, another respondent argued that the statistics were "stacked" because "there are more people in that age group with cars." Yet, another noted "it is a shame that a minority of under 26 year old drivers give the majority of under 26 year drivers a bad image." This young male aged between 19 and 21 described how this "image" resulted in higher insurance premiums for males in contrast to females of the same age. Several respondents questioned the validity of the statement and denied applicability to themselves. Such as the respondent who claimed that the statement was "a lot of crap. I drive 400 km a week and have had dozens of close calls - never once was I at fault." Reinforcing the belief of inevitability noted in the previous question a respondent from Youth Access stated that "accidents can happen to anyone. It totally depends on the circumstances and not necessarily the age of the driver."

Certainly, some males, mainly in the older age brackets were more modest about their driving ability and showed greater awareness of the hazardous driving behaviour of younger males. A male aged between 22 and 24 years described how he did not consider himself as being "an excellent driver" but that he "compensated for this by being careful." He explained that "the increased risk taking behaviour is wired biologically into young people (especially men) and that they will always be the group with the most accidents". Another respondent from the same age group admitted that the statement was true, because "some of the things that my friends and I have done in the past prove it." Partly due to the predominance of the younger age groups that participated in this survey such attitudes were few and far between. Overwhelmingly, young drivers did not associate their driving behaviour or their gender/age group as being more at risk on the roads than any other driver.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The motor vehicle for young males is the means by which that they can gain independence. This sense of independence is accompanied by feelings of powerfulness. This powerfulness is expressed through the glorification of speed. It is somewhat of a paradox that the young males that participated in this survey have demonstrated an awareness of the dangers associated with negative driving practices. Yet, they fail to conceptualise their driving behaviour, especially speeding, as inappropriate. There is a presumption among young males that being informed with the latest road rules makes them superior drivers. Aspects of experience are overwhelmingly ignored..

The questionnaire survey has highlighted young males' attitudes towards road safety campaigns and their perceived driving ability. These results taken together with the statistical profile of young males' involvement in traffic accidents has confirmed a



construction of a hegemonic masculinity that is ultimately damaging to young males. Their responses have indicated that their driving behaviour, notably in regard to speed and ability, are mutually accepted and legitimised through their interpretation of what they believe constitutes being male.

Fig. 4.1 Impact of television commercials

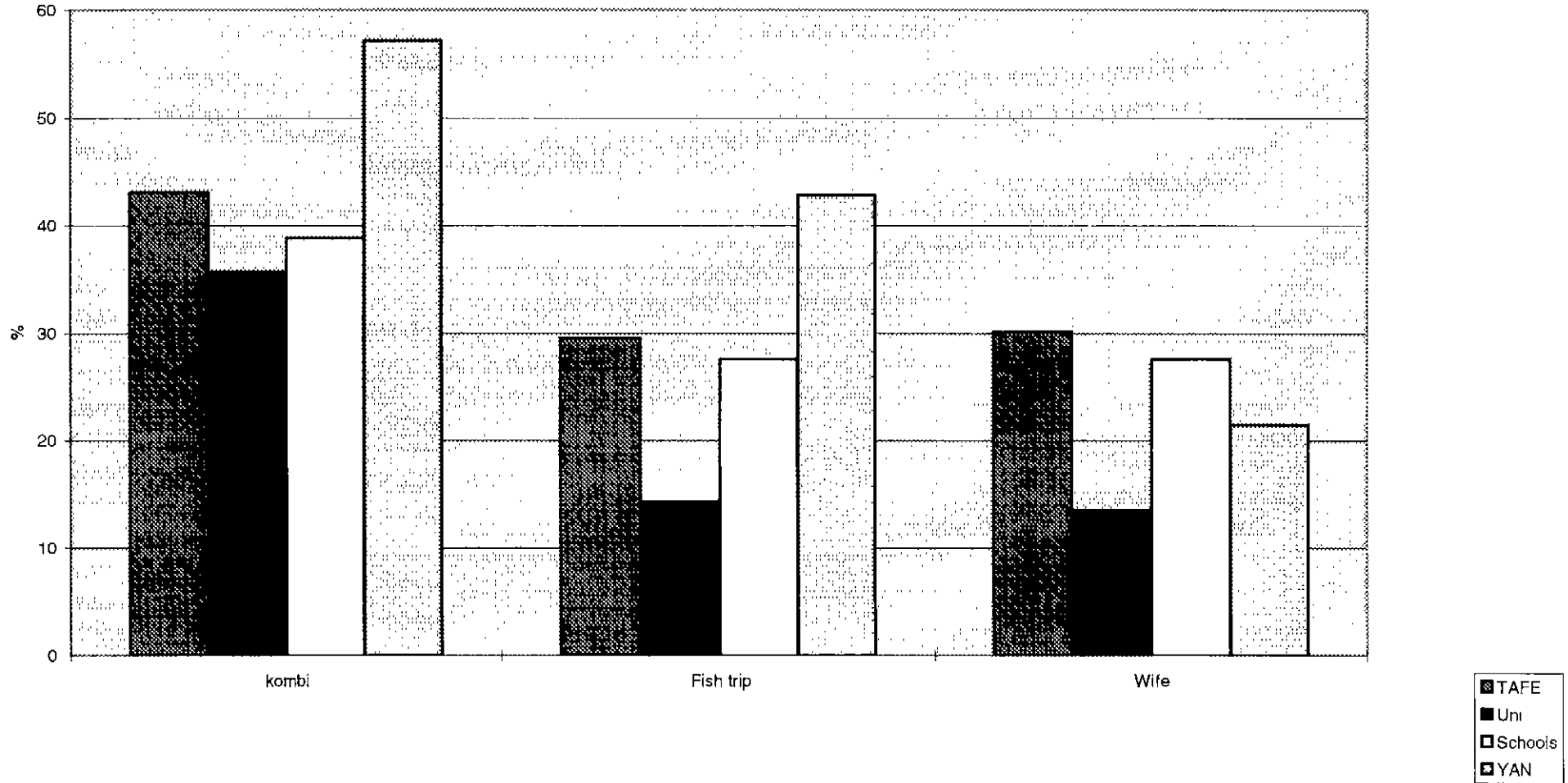


Fig. 4.2 Impact of road safety campaign

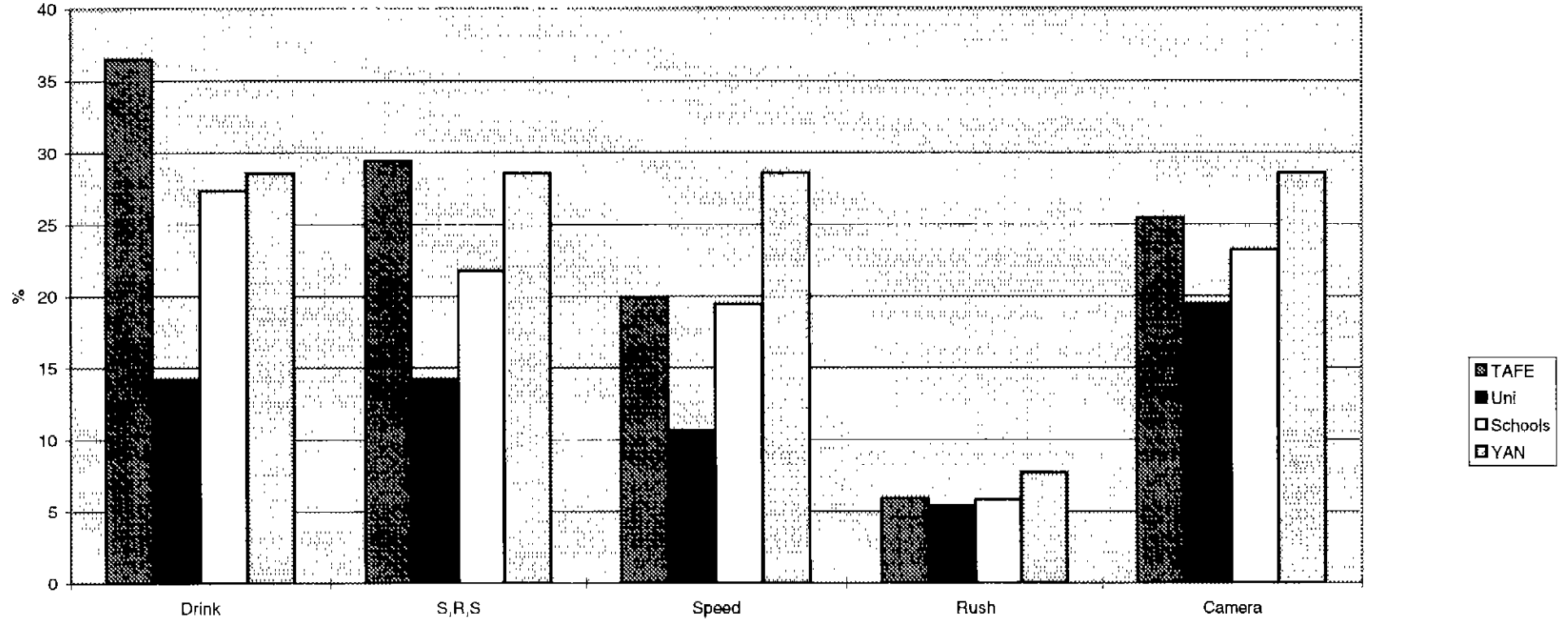


Fig. 4.3 Response to road safety campaign

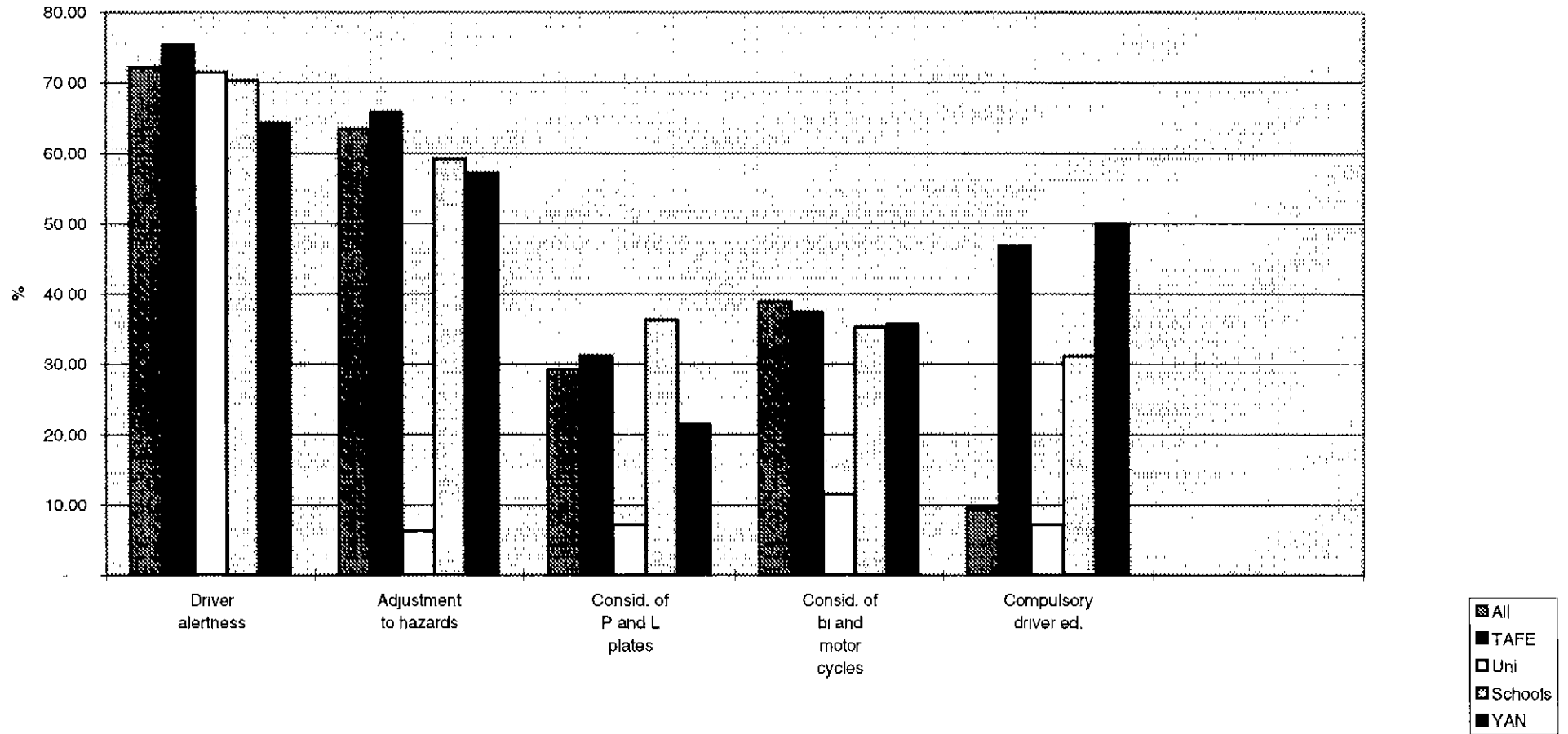
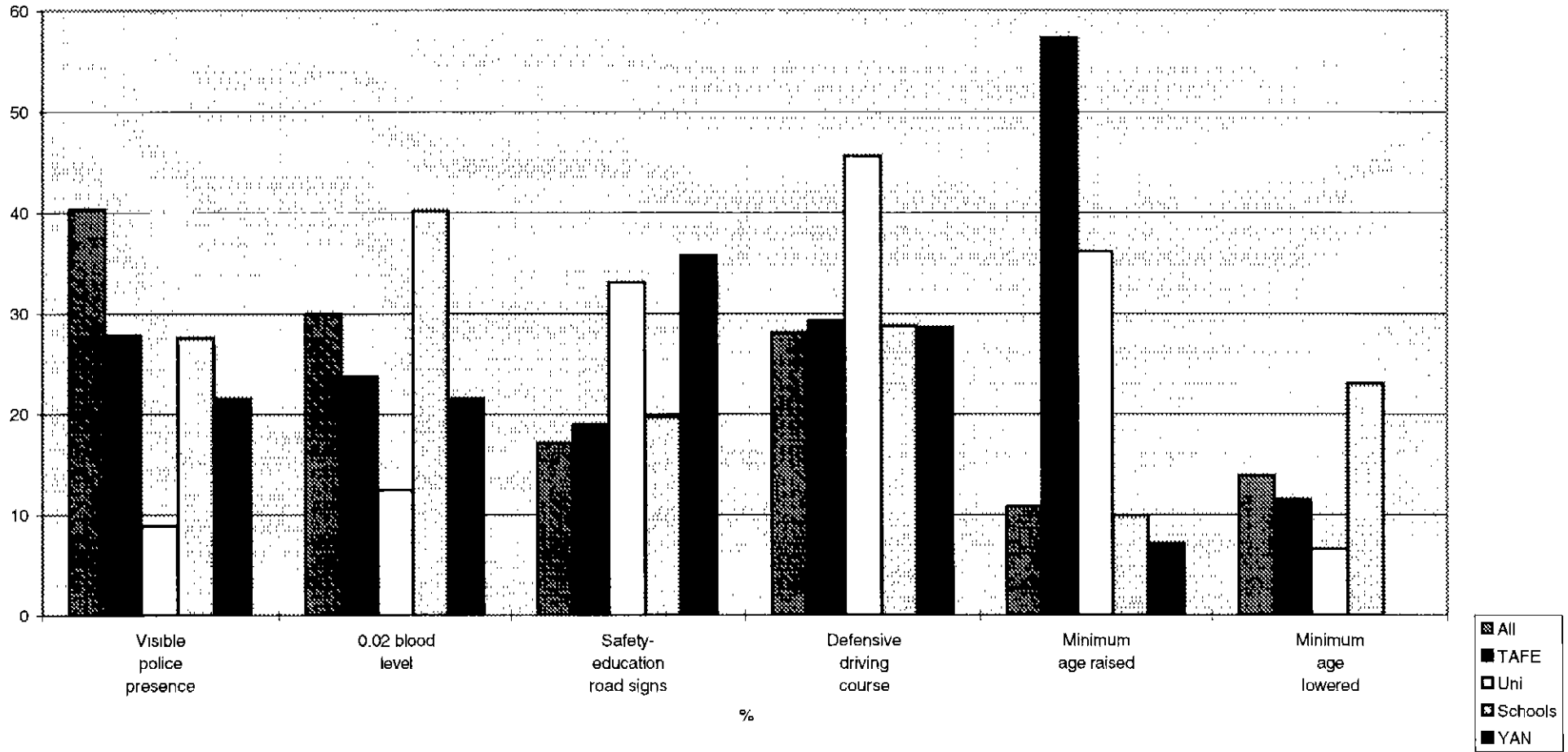


Fig. 4.4 Response to road safety campaign (B)



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS: THE YOUNG MALE DRIVER

#### 5.1 Introduction

This research, at both the quantitative and qualitative levels, indicates a high prevalence of accident involvement for drivers aged 16 to 26 years. Young male drivers are less skilful in recognising unsafe road conditions and engage in driving habits that are inherently risky to both their safety and to the safety of other drivers. Overall, young males overestimate their driving ability and underestimate their lack of experience and chances of being involved in an accident. This chapter will reflect on the implications of these findings in relation to their attitudes towards road safety and the effectiveness of deterrent strategies. The hypothesis that the involvement of young males in motor vehicle accidents is culturally and socially determined will be also examined.

#### 5.2 Invincible drivers

The analysis concerned with Hunter RTA data in Chapter Three identified young male drivers as being disproportionately represented in traffic accidents. Yet, in spite of these statistics that proved otherwise, the majority of young drivers were confident of their own driving ability. The questionnaire survey results suggested that attitudes towards driving and their ability may have been well established before they applied for a Learners' Licence. Around 70 per cent of the participants began "driving" before the legal age. They were given parental permission to drive in "off road" situations under the assumption that they could not come to harm, or conversely, hurt anyone else. Undoubtedly, the "child's play" context of their early driving experiences has the potential to encourage a confidence in their driving skills well beyond their ability. Certainly, concepts concerning the destructive capability of a motor vehicle are beyond the comprehension of a young child. Moreover, their confidence in their driving ability was possibly reinforced whilst learning to drive.

This research has indicated the important role that fathers play in determining their son's driving behaviour. Invariably when a parent gives their teenager driving lessons, it should be recognised that the parent has developed skills and a confidence gained from at least twenty years of driving experience. Research into the impact of roadside memorials on motorists' driving behaviour revealed that mature male drivers believed that they had little impact on the assumption that they were "capable drivers" (Hartig and Dunn 1996). It can be assumed that this confidence can be transferred from the father to the son and influences their attitudes towards driving. Moreover, bad driving behaviours and negative attitudes towards other drivers could also be transferred. It is interesting that young males recognised the 'dangerous driving' behaviour of other drivers, notably women and old men, but failed to recognise the dangers of their own driving practices. More significantly, men aged in their forties and fifties were identified by some respondents as being the age cohort most likely to engage in drink-

driving. However, the overall driving practices of this mature age/gender group were not perceived negatively by any group that participated within the survey.

It can be argued that the confidence exhibited by young male drivers was instilled in them by their father's attitude towards his capability as a driver. This confidence, combined with the notion that they are more knowledgeable on road rules, creates a false security about their driving ability. In the Survey Questionnaire young males recognised the dangers of speeding in relation to the main causes of traffic accidents (Question 12), but failed to attribute this risk to their own driving practices. Indeed, the reality of the consequences of speeding did not register as being a dangerous practice. The only perceived consequence of speeding was that they would invariably incur a fine or loss of points.

### **5.3 The influence of deterrence policies in promoting good driving behaviour**

Deterrence plays a major role in ensuring that society upholds institutional laws. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of a legal threat often rests on the perceived risk of detection (Legge *et al* 1994). In an attempt to promote road safety, deterrence policies have been given added emphasis. Mandatory laws such as the wearing of seat belts and lower Blood Alcohol Levels, have reduced road fatalities (Robertson 1996). To ensure compliance with these laws stricter surveillance, increased penalties and shock tactic principles have been introduced. But how effective are these strategies in influencing driving behaviour?

Some analysts have suggested tougher penalties, including imprisonment terms to ensure compliance with traffic regulations (Angell *et al* 1994; Brewer R D, Morris, Cole, Watkins, Patetta & Popkin 1994). However, research indicates that such strategies have had minimal impact. For example, Williamson's (1996) research on recidivist drink-drivers found although the threat of imprisonment was a deterrent, over 60 per cent of the offenders she interviewed admitted to driving while disqualified. Kingsnorth (1991) discovered that a shock tactic programme that involved taking young drink-driver offenders to visit a morgue had little influence in modifying their driving behaviour. Conversely, another programme that involved 16 year old drivers being showed graphic pictures of actual traffic accident victims was successful in changing driving behaviour (Kuthy S, Grap, Penn & Henderson 1995). However, it must be emphasised that the results from this programme were gauged after only one month. Nonetheless, it is significant that High School Students that participated in the questionnaire were influenced by the graphic nature of road safety television commercials. (See Survey Question 7 in Chapter 4.) This tends to suggest that young males are most responsive to preventative road safety campaigns at the beginning of their driving experience.

Much of the above noted literature refers explicitly to the prevention of drink-driving practices. This research has confirmed that drink-driving is not acceptable behaviour among young males in the Newcastle region. However, it is worth noting Legge's *et al* (1994) argument that in regard to drink-driving, unless alcohol addiction is corrected, tougher penalties are worthless. Similarly, unless attitudes towards speeding are altered, punishment will not reduce the disproportional rate of young males in motor vehicle accidents. This research has unequivocally confirmed that the threat of a

penalty has had little impact on their driving behaviour. Changing social norms and attitudes may be more successful in changing driving behaviour (Wieczorek *et al* 1994).

Young male drivers correctly perceive the liability of speeding in relation to accidents (Survey Question 12). Yet, because of their confidence in their driving skills and the belief that speed limits were unnecessary, penalties were not effective. Indeed the majority of male respondents that participated in this survey, believed that they were being unnecessarily targeted by the Police. An interview conducted with two Police Patrol Officers in Newcastle confirm this perception. They regularly stop young drivers for speed related offences and discover that they have been apprehended on several other occasions for similar offences. One Officer was rather surprised that young males got angry with the Police. "Why don't they stop and look at what they are doing and wonder why they are coming under notice from the Police?" The Police Officers in question were very much aware of the risks that young male drivers were subjecting themselves to and worried about their attitude to speed and driving in general. In part they attributed such attitudes to inexperience. "You can't give them experience. You can't give them maturity - it's just something they have to learn themselves" commented one Officer. Both Officers were of the opinion that in comparison to other drivers, young males were particularly reckless and foolhardy. One Officer noted that "young drivers have no fear. Less fear, more risks. They just don't see the consequences of their action." This Officer was equally concerned about the driving behaviour of his own son. However, a contradiction arises where the penalty for speeding does not serve as a deterrence and subsequently has minimal impact on changing driving behaviour.

It would appear that there is a critical relationship between perception of driving behaviour and the threat of receiving a penalty. Driving while under the influence of alcohol represented unacceptable driving behaviour. The rationale for this belief stems not from the perceived risk of a penalty but directly from the acceptance that "drink driving is a crime and shouldn't be accepted or tolerated" (High School survey respondent). Implicit within many of the respondents' comments concerning 'drink-driving' was that it undermined their ability as a driver. In contrast, speeding improved their driving prowess. The detailed attention given by respondents when listing their speeding offences suggested a sense of pride and achievement. Thus, intervention by the Police and the penalties designed to curtail such activity is not effective in deterring them from speeding. Instead it tended to promote antagonism between the legal enforcers of speed limits and the offenders. More significantly, deterrence theory works on two principles. Firstly, that people will act in way to minimise the risk of punishment and secondly that they will react to the punishment in a rational manner. If the aim of the penalty is to change attitudes towards speeding, then it can be stated that the penalty as a deterrence is ineffective. Young males perceived the penalty more in terms of inconvenience, and many others reacted with anger (Table 4.16). Very few regretted their behaviour, and more importantly very few changed their driving behaviour. Indeed, while young males perceive speed penalties as a 'mark of merit' it could be argued that the risk of apprehension and the penalties are assisting in promoting dangerous driving behaviour among young male drivers. Recognition of these factors is crucial if policy makers are serious in their commitment in combating the problem of speed and young males. There also appears to be a need to understand



and evaluate the relationship of speed with how young males define themselves as individuals. Certainly, the driving behaviour exhibited by young males is symptomatic of their social construction of masculinity.

#### **5.4 The social construction of male behaviour**

Motor vehicle accidents constitute a major cause of injury and death within Australia. Notwithstanding the high health-care costs associated with these accidents, the level of personal trauma within society at large is substantial. Today, the motor vehicle plays a pivotal role in our lives. The cost of this transportation 'need' in our lives is the silent acceptance of the loss of so many lives. It is too simplistic to designate these preventable deaths under the euphuism of "accident." The loss of young males in motor vehicle accidents is predetermined by decisions and social values contingent upon the construction of hegemonic masculinity (Miles 1991). This research has identified "speed" and "inexperience" as major correlations with the disproportionate high rate of involvement of males aged 16 to 26 years in motor vehicle accidents in the Hunter RTA Region. Females of the same age cohort similarly lack experience, yet are not involved in accidents at an equal rate of participation. Therefore the risk factor for young males must surely be measured by speed and attitude.

Males seek manhood individually and competitively through excessive and aggressive male posturing. Aggressive driving behaviour is in itself excessive male posturing. Edgley (1987) argues that grand prix racing epitomises male heroism. It serves as a 'macho' context where "real men" can face the challenges of death, beat it and take the rewards. Similarly, young males equate speeding as facilitating their driving skills. More significantly, it would seem that they deliberately place themselves in a position of danger in order to express their expertise and power over technology and to define themselves as being quintessentially male.

In Chapter Two it was suggested that lacking a formalised 'rite of passage' young males use their mastery over motor vehicles to mark the transition from boyhood to manhood. This research confirms this hypothesis. The survey indicated that males appropriate a driving licence as a means to gain independence. The driving licence provides them with the mechanism to achieve personal autonomy and detachment from their childhood. In other words it provides them with the personal power whereby they can establish themselves as an individual and as appropriately masculine. Being masculine is interpreted as doing "men things" or, in other words, not doing female things (Bird 1996). Explicitly or implicitly the need to be "one of the boys" meant conforming to peer-pressure. As Thombs *et al* (1994) argues there is a great need for peer acceptance and approval for young males. This invariably involves disregard for personal safety. Certainly, in part their exaggerated driving behaviour provides them with a defence against the fear of maternal power and feminine identification. Women and old men were overwhelmingly perceived as slow drivers. Devaluing the skills of women and older male drivers rendered these groups as powerless. Young males adopt very different driving behaviour so that they can be distinguished from female and older male drivers. It also enabled them to maintain their definition of masculinity and their self esteem.

The gender differences in male/female involvement in road traffic accidents can be attributed to gender roles. Men and women drive differently. Research undertaken in Britain asserted that most young children felt that their mothers were safer drivers than their fathers (*Sunday Times* 9.3.1997). In part this could be related to the role of motor vehicles within their lives. Women invariably view motor vehicles in more utilitarian terms than males. Yet, it is important to remember that males and females are socialised to accept specific gender roles. More aggressive driving behaviour is expected from and defined as an aspect of the male gender role. Young males may speed in order to live up to this gender expectation in order to prove their masculinity. Certainly for young males there is strong pressure to conform to appropriate masculinity characteristics. Sadly, males testing their manhood engage in activities that all too frequently will result in death. Changing these statistics will necessitate redefining gender roles.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

Road fatality is largely a male cause of death within Australia. Overwhelmingly, young males are overly represented in road traffic statistics. They are also less receptive to official driving safety messages and deterrence policies. Driving attitudes lies at the crux of driving behaviour. Young males are at risk within our society because of the damaging articulations of masculinity. It is argued here that changing social attitudes and expectations of male behaviour may well constitute a deterrent to driving dangerously rather than by perceived risk of legal penalties.

## CHAPTER SIX

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH PROPOSALS

#### 6.1: Introduction

The following discussion outlines recommendations stemming from this research and suggests potential areas for further research.

The two dimensions of this research were firstly, to investigate young male drivers' driving behaviour, and secondly to analyse their attitudes towards road safety campaigns. It is very difficult to separate these two factors. The RTA data analysed in Chapter Three confirmed the problematic nature of young males driving behaviour. They are disproportionately represented in the statistics. Chapter Four highlighted the attitudes of young males towards driver education in relation to their perceived ability. It was clear that although many do recognise the dangers inherent to bad driving behaviour, most young males fail to recognise their limitations as an inexperienced driver. Chapter Five has argued that the focus on deterrence has on the whole been ineffective in changing the attitudes of the group most at risk.

#### 6.2: Recommendations

In recent years there has been public outcry over the road toll. This public outcry has resulted in recommendations for a coordinated nationally implemented strategy to tackle the road safety problem. Clearly, if policies are implemented simultaneously within all states, the importance of road safety may make a greater impact on driving behaviour. Some of the suggestions to improve road safety have correctly started at examining changes for young drivers. For example, it has been suggested that in regard to Learner drivers' a logbook should be introduced, and the 'L' Plate training period should be extended to one year (*The Australian* 6.8.1996). Such suggestions should receive wide support from the wider community, and from young drivers themselves. However, these policies must be implemented in a manner to ensure that attitudes towards driver education and safety are maintained for all road users.

Australians must move away from the attitude that everyone has a right to drive. A drivers licence has to be regarded as a privilege that involves responsibility to oneself and the rest of society. The following recommendations are suggested in light of the responses from the young males involved in this survey. It is recognised that the following recommendations will require a thorough examination by relevant government bodies. Additionally, it should be emphasised that these recommendations should not be introduced retrospectively, but that young people are aware of the changes prior to them attaining the minimum age/qualification requirements.

##### 6.2.2: Gaining a Licence

For young people gaining a licence is a ticket to adulthood. It was remarkable that many males surveyed in this study believed that getting a licence was "too easy." The simplicity of attaining a drivers licence surely influences their driving behaviour.

Similarly, driving attitudes of the instructor are transferred to the learner. At present in NSW any person that holds an unrestricted licence may supervise and instruct a 'L' Plate driver. Therefore it is recommended that all intending "L' Plate drivers:

*pass minimum driving requirement through a professional driving school, or a designated recognised authority; for example within educational institutions .*

These basic requirements should incorporate practical basic driver education either through a computer based driving simulator or 'off road' driving situations, and theoretical driver knowledge. After attaining their 'L' Plates all learner drivers should be instructed by professional instructors. This may require the need for:

*all non-professional instructors (such as parents) to attain a instructor's permit following an examination of their driving ability and recent driving record.*

This research indicates that young drivers would support a 12 month 'L' Plate period and the implementation of a logbook. However, if the logbook is to gain credibility it must be endorsed by professional authorities. It is suggested that:

*throughout the 12 months learning period, periodic testing of driving skills (of say three month periods), and the supervision of the logbook should be assessed by professional driving schools or recognised Road Transport Authorities.*

Such a policy would imbue professionalism into learner drivers' to a standard previously unknown.

### **6.2.3: 'P' Plate Drivers**

The statistics indicate that 18 year old male drivers are most at risk at being involved in an accident. Most 18 year olds are either 'P' Plate drivers or have most recently become unrestricted licence holders. In either case, 18 year old drivers are given relatively free range on the roads at a time when they lack experience and maturity to assess the situation. It can be argued that it is very difficult to give 18 year olds driving experience. However, it may be possible to introduce experience into the system. NSW State Government's StaySafe Committee has proposed that young drivers spend up to three years on their 'P' Plates. This would enable drivers to gain valuable experience before gaining their unrestricted licences. However, this system must be flexible enough to promote safe driving practices. It is recommended that:

*a graduated 'P' Plate system be introduced with a points system that rewards good driving behaviour.*

Within this system the emphasis must be on loss of points to promote good driving practices rather than raising revenue. Accordingly, it is suggested that the loss of a specific number of points will determine the length of time a driver remains on 'P' Plates. For example, although two years should be the minimum time any driver remains on their 'P' Plates, drivers with a minimum loss of points would be entitled to apply for an unrestricted licence at the end of this period. This should not be mandatory but should require further examination of driving ability and a knowledge test of the road rules. On the otherhand, loss of a specific number of points would

result in remaining on 'P' Plates for a longer period of time. In other words the responsibility of good driving and length of time on 'P' Plates is placed on the individual driver.

#### **6.2.4: Driver education**

Respondents in this survey recognised the dangers associated with drivers who had been driving for long periods of time who had little recognition of changes to road laws. In many ways, this criticism is well founded. If Australia is serious in its attempt to come to grips with bad driving behaviour, which is rightly perceived by young drivers as not being the prerogative of the young it must implement policies that take on board these considerations:

*All drivers should undertake a practical and theoretical test every ten years.*

Drivers involved in serious road traffic accidents should be required to take such tests following the accident and again following a five year period.

### **6.3: Proposals for Further research**

#### **6.3.1: The female factor**

Inexperience applies equally to young females as it does to young males. Yet, female involvement rate is much lower than that for males. Little is known what influences these gender differences with respect to accident risk among young drivers. More significantly, as highlighted in Chapter Three, teenage males are more likely to be involved in traffic accidents than males in their early twenties. Generally, male teenagers socialise with other males and therefore are more likely to conform to peer pressure. In contrast, there is a greater likelihood for males in their twenties to socialise in mixed company. It would be interesting to discover, what influence females have on males in regard to their driving behaviour.

#### **6.3.2: The role of fathers**

This research has suggested that fathers play an important role in shaping their sons' attitudes towards driving behaviour. More research is needed that specifically enquires into the fathers' driving behaviour and attitudes towards road education. This study should also involve examining how adolescents perceive their parents' driving behaviour in their formative driving years.

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**The following questions relate to your driving experience, car ownership and the type of vehicle that you normally drive**

Question 1.

What is your current driving situation?

*Please tick the box(es) that are correct for your current driving situation*

- 1) No driving experience.....
- 2) Currently on a Learner's licence.....
- 3) Currently on a Provisional licence.....
- 4) I have been on "Ps" for less than 6 months.....
- 5) I have been on "Ps" between 6-12 months.....
- 6) I have been driving on a Full licence for 1-2 years.....
- 7) I have been driving on a Full licence for 2-4 years.....
- 8) I have been driving on a Full licence for 4-6 years.....
- 9) I have been driving on a Full licence for more than 6 years.....
- 10) I hold a motorcycle licence.....   
(please specify type (ie Learner/full) and number of years).....  
.....
- 11) I hold a heavy vehicle drivers' licence.....   
(please specify number of years).....

Question 2.

How old were you when you took out a Learner's Permit?

*Please tick the box that is correct for you*

- 1) 16 years.....
- 2) 17 years.....
- 3) 18 years.....
- 4) 19 years.....
- 5) 20 years or older (please specify).....

Question 3.

What were the most important factors that prompted you to get your learner's licence?

*Give each factor a rating out of 5 - with a score of 0 representing little or no importance, to a score of 5 being very important.*

- 1) Social pressure (eg. all my friends were driving).....
  - 2) My parents encouraged me to learn.....
  - 3) I wanted to be independent.....
  - 4) In order to gain employment.....
  - 5) Other (please specify).....
- Out of all the above factors which one was the most important?

.....

Do you have any other comments on why you wanted to learn to drive?

.....  
.....  
.....

Question 4.

Who taught you to drive?

*You may tick all the boxes which apply to you*

- 1) Your father.....
- 2) Your mother.....
- 3) Another relative.....
- 4) A friend.....
- 5) A Driving School.....
- 6) Other (please specify).....

.....

From the above list who do you regard as having the most important influence on your early driving behaviour?.....

Question 5.

Please answer the following questions relating to the vehicle that you generally drive or ride.

- a) Who owns the vehicle that you normally drive? (eg. self or parent).....
- b) What type of vehicle is it? (eg. sedan, station wagon).....
- c) What is the engine size? (if known).....
- d) Are there any modifications? (Please specify, eg. "mag" wheels).....

.....

Question 6.

Did you drive a motor vehicle or a motorcycle before you were old enough to hold a learner's licence?

*Please tick the box that applies to you*

YES.....                       NO.....

If your answer is No please go to question 7

If your answer is Yes please specify what age you were and the circumstances under which you drove.

.....  
.....

**The following questions relate to the issue of road safety education. Your answers and your opinions on these issues are very important to the survey findings**

Question 7.

In recent years there has been a number of television commercials promoting road safety education. Please consider how important these commercials are to your driving behaviour.

*Please give each commercial a rating out of 5 - with a score of 0 representing little or no importance, to a score of 5 being very important. If you have not seen one of these commercials please tick the "no comment" box".*

**TV commercials**

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1) The Combi-van.....   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No comment (I have not seen this commercial).....                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2) Male fishing trip/family watching the accident being reported on TV..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No comment (I have not seen this commercial).....                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3) Wife and telephone answering machine.....                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No comment (I have not seen this commercial).....                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Do you have any other comments on these or other televised road safety commercials?

.....

.....

.....

In recent years road signs promoting road safety education have become common. Usually there is a slogan reinforcing the message relating to speed or drink-driving. How effective are these slogans/messages in influencing your driving behaviour?

*Please give each issue a rating out of 5 - with a score of 0 representing little or no effect, to a score of 5 being very important. If you have not seen one of these messages please tick the "no comment" box".*

**Slogans/messages on road signs**

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 4) If you drink and drive you're a bloody idiot..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No comment (I have not seen this slogan).....        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5) Stop, Revive, Survive.....                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No comment (I have not seen this slogan).....        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6) What speed are you going now?.....                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No comment (I have not seen this slogan).....        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7) Rushing home? We'll leave a light on for you..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No comment (I have not seen this slogan).....        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8) Speed cameras are used in this area.....          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No comment (I have not seen this slogan).....        | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Do you have any other comments about these or other road safety reminders? For example what is your reaction when you see them?

.....

.....

.....

Question 8.

In relation to the issue of road-safety how would you rate the following statements.  
Give each statement a rating out of 5 with a score of 0 representing little or no importance, to a score of 5 being very important.

- 1) Drivers should always remain alert.....
- 2) Drivers should adjust their speed to hazards' eg. fog/rain.....
- 3) Drivers should show more consideration to L and P plate drivers.....
- 4) Drivers should show more consideration to Bicycles and Motorcycles....
- 5) Driver education should be compulsory for all young drivers.....
- 6) There should be a greater visible presence of police on the roads.....
- 7) A blood alcohol level of 0.02% should apply to all drivers.....
- 8) There should be more road-safety education signs on the roads.....
- 9) All drivers should undertake defensive driving courses.....
- 10) The minimum age for holding a licence should be raised.....   
(please specify age).....
- 11) The minium age for holding a licence should be lowered.....   
(please specify age).....

Out of the above list what factor do you consider the most important for improving road safety?

.....

Do you have any other comments about ways to improve road safety?

.....

.....

.....

.....

**The following questions relate to driving and traffic infringement penalties. Please remember that there is NO WAY that you can be identified, however, if you do not want to answer a particular question just move on to the next question.**

Question 9.

While you have been driving have you experienced any of the following.  
*Please tick all the appropriate box(es)*

- 1) A fine.....
- 2) Loss of points.....
- 3) Loss of licence.....

If this question does not apply to you please go to question 11

If you have ticked one or more boxes for Question 9 - please explain why you lost your licence/loss of points/fine (eg. speeding/following an accident etc.)

.....

.....

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Question 10.

Please rate the following factors that best describes what you experienced following the above noted penalty (Question 9).

*Give each statement a rating out of 5 with a score of 0 representing little or no importance, to a score of 5 being very important.*

1) Inconvenience.....

2) Peer pressure.....

3) Parental disapproval.....

4) Personal feelings (eg. anger).....   
(please specify)

.....  
5) Became a more careful driver.....

6) Didn't really bother you.....

7) Other (please specify).....

.....  
Out of the above factors what one was the most significant?

.....  
Question 11.

Have you, as a driver or as a passenger ever been involved in an accident?

*Please tick the appropriate response*

YES.....

NO.....

If your answer is No please go to Question 12.



If your answer is yes (for Question 11) could you please answer the following

What caused the accident?.....

.....

Was anyone injured?(if yes please specify).....YES..  NO...

.....

.....

Did you change your driving behaviour following the accident?....YES..  NO...

(Please specify).

.....

.....

.....

Question 12.

What do you think are the main causes of traffic accidents?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Question 13.

It is generally stated that drivers aged under 26 years of age are most at risk of being involved in an accident.

Do you have any comments on this statement in relation to your own driving ability?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Question 14.

The following list contains a number of statements relating to driving, please indicate whether you think the statement is true or false.

*Please put a circle around the answer you think to be most correct. If you are unsure circle the "not sure" box.*

Learner and provisional licence holders must not go faster than 80 km/hour	True	False	Not sure
If you are aged under 25 years you are allowed to drive with a blood alcohol level of .05	True	False	Not sure
As a P driver you will lose your licence for 3 months if you get 4 or more demerit points	True	False	Not sure
You are allowed to do a U turn at traffic lights	True	False	Not sure
Drinking black coffee helps to speed up the rate at which your body gets rid of alcohol	True	False	Not sure
If your view is clear you can overtake across a single or double unbroken line	True	False	Not sure
The police must attend and investigate all crashes where a person fails to stop and exchange information	True	False	Not sure
Where there are no speed limit signs and there are street lights the speed limit is 100 km/hr	True	False	Not sure

**The last few questions relate to yourself and your family. There is NO WAY that you can be identified; however, if you do not wish to answer a particular question, just move on to the next one.**

*Please tick the boxes that best describes you.*

Question 15.

What is your age?

- a) 16-18 years.....
- b) 19-21 years.....
- c) 22-24 years.....
- d) 25-26 years.....

Question 16.

Marital status

- a) Single.....
- b) Married.....
- c) Living with a partner.....

Question 17.

Which of the following best describes your household

- a) Single parent.....
- b) Family.....
- c) A couple (no children).....
- d) A shared or group household (eg. unrelated people sharing).....
- e) Other (please specify eg. college).....

.....

Question 18.

Are you?

- a) A Student (full-time).....
- b) A Student (part-time).....
- c) Employed (full-time).....

Please state your occupation.....

- d) Employed (part-time).....

Please state your occupation.....

- e) Unemployed.....

If looking for work please state the type of work you want to undertake

.....

Question 19.

What is your mother's occupation?.....

What is your father's occupation?.....

Thank you for your help in completing this questionnaire.

Please remember to post in the envelope provided.

**If you wish to make any further comments on your driving experiences and/or road safety issues or if you would like to be involved in further interviews concerned with these issues please contact me on (049) 21 5080.**

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