Risky driving behaviour in the case of young drivers. The role of social influence mechanisms in the group

Introduction

Young drivers have always represented a serious health problem in Europe and elsewhere due to their high rate of mortality as a result of a car crash. Young drivers are defined as those drivers less than 25 years (OECD, 2006). Even if many countries have already implemented a procedure to prevent an increase in young drivers' accident rates, the measures remain insufficient.

In Europe, in 2004, young drivers and their passengers represented 3.814 people killed as a result of a car crash. This means that almost 21% of all car crashes victims were young people. It is considered that 1.3 other road users are killed in the same crash that a young driver dies (Twisk, 2007). Therefore young drivers' crash rates and behaviour represent a reason to worry.

Regarding car crashes situation in the case of young French drivers they represent almost 21% of deaths among drivers' deaths while accounting for only 9% of the general population (IRTAD, 2010). In Romania, the number of young drivers involved in car crashes is less well registered therefore we have incomplete data on the number of deaths. However the data we had access to indicates that the rate of mortality for each car crash in Romania is 1/3 while in the European Union is 1/40 *("CNADNR,")*.

Peer presence and effect on drivers' performance

The field of the relationship between passengers and young drivers and their effects on the security of these ones in traffic is still a matter of debate. Several studies have reported that the presence of peers in a vehicle driven by a young driver can lead to a significantly increased risk of having an accident (Arnett, Offer, & Fine, 1997; Doherty, Andrey, & MacGregor, 1998 , Farrow, 1987; Lam, Norton, Woodward, Connor, & Ameratunga, 2003, Moller & Gregersen, 2008; Preusser, Ferguson, & Williams, 1998). However, other studies have reversed the findings indicate that the negative effect of passengers and highlighted the positive role of passengers.

General discussion

This thesis is focused on a specific population, young drivers, 18 to 25 years, whom, according to statistics, are most at risk drivers. Apart from factors related to lack of experience, young drivers have a series of characteristics. The age of young drivers may explain the decisions they take when adopting a lesser safe way of driving. In addition, sensation seeking may help explain many of the risk behaviors

among youth. Many variables may explain the overrepresentation of individuals less than 25 years among the victims of road crashes.

Among these variables, norms and peer pressure can also contribute to increase the risk that the young driver takes. The normative pressure can determine the change in the response of an individual confronted with erroneous judgments of a group with which the person has no previous relationship (Asch, 1951) by pushing them to make the same misjudgments. Even if the individual does not consider this answer as correct it will behave in the group, complying only under the influence of pressure.

The same things happen every day in different groups, and groups of friends of young drivers are no exception. The situation is even more complicated if the individual identifies with the group, because according to Tajfel and Turner (1979), more an individual considers that he belongs to a group, more he is motivated to identify the norms of this group and to comply.

Research related to passengers presence in the car (Chen, Baker, Braver, & Li, 2000; Preusser, Ferguson, & Williams, 1998; Rueda-Domingo et al., 2004; Vollrath, Meilinger, & Krager, 2002; Williams, 2001) have lead sometimes to contradictory results. Some researchers believe that the presence of passengers can help protect young driver while another part believes that their presence may increase the risk of an accident. This domain has been little studied outside correlational studies between the number of passengers and the number of road accidents. Recently, Horvath, Lewis, and Watson (2012) found that drivers identified their passengers tend to get higher scores with regard to the speed that drivers unidentified. These results indicate that drivers are quite sensitive to the expectations of their friends and try to meet them.

Trying to analyze the extent to which perceived norms may explain the involvement of young drivers in dangerous behavior, we decided to use the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Briefly, Ajzen (1991) considers that the behavior predicted by the intention to achieve and that the intention is predicted by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.

One of the concepts we are interested and which is part of this theory are operationalized subjective norms as perceived expectations from others / friends. In agreement with the meta-analysis (Armitage & Conner, 2001) subjective norms is less significant: we know they are always considered as the worst predictors of intention. However, new studies indicate that norms were underestimated, especially with regard to driving behavior (Åberg & Wallen Warner, 2008; Cestac, Paran, and Delhomme, 2011).

The instrument used to assess risky behaviors was particularized for each country. The only differences are for attitudes and perceived behavioral control.

The aim of this work is not to review the differences identified during the construction of instruments in its entirety, but it is necessary to recall that the two populations have responded to particularized instruments. We preferred to give up the opportunity to compare from statistical point of view the results identified in the first study in order to identify the characteristics and particularities of each population.

Study 1 was divided into four parts. The theory of planned behavior has been used to predict specific and general risky behaviors. A general conclusion indicates that for the population of young drivers, subjective norms represent an area that should be investigated more closely in relation to risk-taking. The results of this study are encouraging in that direction, but must be interpreted with caution.

Subjective norms can predict the intention to perform a specific behavior but also the self-reported behaviour, as in the case of alcohol consumption. It is interesting to note that the scales are part of the norms assessment often appears as predictors of different behaviors. For example, the perceived norms of friends have often been identified as good predictors, suggesting that while young drivers perceive their friends as favorable behavior like speeding, they will be more willing to s' engage in the behavior.

Differences between the two samples (Romanian and French) were visible from the beginning and analysis. These differences were confirmed by subsequent studies. So, Romanian young drivers are much more sensitive indices of the social environment (other drivers, friends, passengers, families) while French drivers focus more on the usefulness of the behavior and control. The sensitivity to the social environment of young Romanians can be explained by the need for young drivers to adapt their behavior in traffic to existing applications. We have already highlighted that young drivers do not perceive Romanian control high valued behaviors, unlike young French and so they feel even more the need to be able to adapt and shape their driving behavior. In addition, young Romanians show a need for research sensations that young French do not.

The lack of information on appropriate behavior in traffic makes young drivers Romanian vulnerable to other sources of information such as their friends and significant others. In the case of speed, it has been shown that drivers Romanian consider this transgression as moderately dangerous and consider that it should not be punished by the police. Thus, the social environment as a source of information for the behavior of young drivers related to speed is not, perhaps, the best.

Unlike young drivers Romanian, French youth focus more on their level of control, but also on the practical aspects as to avoid receiving penalty points, save the time spent in traffic and go home. However, we can not deny the importance of norms that predict intention to exceed the speed but also the drive after consuming alcoholic beverages.

In addition, young Romanians show a need to experience that young French people do not and that is evidenced by behavioral beliefs related to speeding and driving under the influence of alcohol. It is true that the Romanian road infrastructure can not do not offer the same conditions as in France and it must be taken into account the fact that young drivers Romanian report fewer miles traveled since obtaining the license as French youth, aspects that may help to explain why they feel less confident in their abilities as a driver and why they feel the need to experiment.

The presence of norms in the prediction of intention to drive under the influence of alcohol and self-reported driving under the influence of alcohol can be explained by the context in which this behavior may appear. Often, young people leave town accompanied by their friends in the car and in this context they consume alcoholic beverages. Context, and the fact that the consequences of driving under the influence of alcohol are not very prominent, can lead to the decision to drive after drinking.

Study 2 confirmed that peer pressure can change the behavior of young drivers so that it meets the demands of this group. Participants indicated an almost unanimous that the driver will comply with the group's request to exceed the speed.

Using three types of pressure, we tried to verify if the peer group can obtain a conformist behavior from the driver. We used a direct active pressure (verbal encouragement) who formulated clearly the desire of the group - to increase the speed, indirect active pressure (history approved by peers) that indirectly formulated request by appealing to the comparison and need of the driver to maintain his status in the group and a passive pressure when demand was never explicitly formulated, but in which the driver knew that his passengers approve exceeding the speed.

In addition we tested whether the level of risk-taking group can influence the behavior and intention of the driver to exceed the speed limit.

The results indicate that risk-taking in regard to speeding, and contextual rather than the driver reacts to peer pressure at a given moment, without thinking too much. Thus, we obtained an effect of the type of pressure on the behavior but not the intention to exceed the speed. Again, the young Romanian population is different from that of young French people. Romanian participants felt similar rates for all types of pressures, speeds in excess of at least 10 km / h faster over the speed limit (90 km / h) while young French drivers for the passive pressure condition estimated values much lower (96 km / h). For Romanian young drivers in the condition passive pressure the estimated average speed is very high suggesting a high sensitivity of participants to group pressures, even to implicit demands.

In conclusion, this work has highlighted the importance of norms and group pressure in explaining the achievement of risk behaviors among youth.

Conclusion

First, regarding the Romanian population, the results show a strong lack of education towards road safety and objective sources of information in this regard. This lack of information is highly visible youth who turn to significant others - friends, family - to acquire them. The real problem is that the people who provide the information did not receive an education in defensive driving or road safety. As we have already stated in the previous pages, after the fall of communism in Romania in 1989, the number of personal vehicles has greatly increased when he was very small before. However, this increase was not accompanied by investment in infrastructure or education in road safety.

The road safety education can take the example of campaigning by France. The latest road safety campaign entitled "Better hang on to life of the wheel" target risk behaviors such as alcohol, driver fatigue and drugs. The spot of the campaign is visible on French television since September 2012, but also on the internet. In Romania, as we have already shown in the previous pages, the authorities have implemented a road safety campaign ("Life has priority"), which unfortunately was poorly publicized. Nevertheless, this campaign is a good starting point. Taking into account the target population of interest, you must choose carefully the media channels. Thus, if we target young drivers should be favored internet and especially social networks (Facebook, GooglePlus).

Also in regard to the target population in France and Romania must take into account road safety education at the school. In France, this approach has already been implemented and high school students are engaged in workshops on the dangers of the road but also in practical activities involving the use of simulators auto, shock tests, etc.. What is very important is to add information about the importance and impact that peer pressure can have on young driver.

Young drivers can also benefit from internships desensitization and information regarding the role of friends in traffic situations. They should be aware that the peer does not assume the consequences of transgressions he promotes. The most common transgressions do not lead to an accident, but a fine and loss of points on the driving license of the young driver. Messages of this type of information campaigns should focus on resistance to persuasive messages and pressures (do not let others decide for you) and accountability of young drivers (it is you who are responsible for your life and the lives of your passengers).

Driving under the influence of alcohol could be reduced following information campaigns but also by making salient the consequences of driving under the influence of alcohol. Messages targeting these consequences can be displayed on the premises where alcohol is consumed. In addition, taking the existing example

in the United States transport services reduced rate can be established (for France, where taxis are expensive) servers or training can be provided so that they can identify people who have drunk too much to drive to offer assistance and to return home without taking the car (a taxi, knowledge). In France, a program similar to that in the U.S. called "designated driver" was implemented. Entitled "Sam, the designated driver" implies a very simple principle: before leaving, people decide together who will not drink to be able to drive the car.

Finally, to address the problem identified in the Romanian population of young drivers, namely the need to experiment, to experience thrills, additional courses conducted in conditions of security may be offered. This idea is already on the Romanian market, a former rally driver offers defensive driving course where drivers can experience extreme situations - skids, aquaplaning - safely in auto simulators. Thus, the driver can learn to handle the car in different situations without doing it on the road.

Even with the limitations of research in psychology and intercultural research, this work represents, especially for Romania, a good starting point.

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