



Centre for Accident Research
& Road Safety - Queensland
(CARRS-Q)

State of the Road

A fact sheet of the Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland



Recently, there has been growing concern among ordinary drivers that aggressive driving is increasing on our roads.¹⁻³

Aggressive drivers are more likely to:

- *be involved in crashes⁴;*
- *be young men;*
- *have high frustration levels and a low regard for others;*
- *be competitive in nature; and*
- *tend to speed, drive impaired by alcohol and/or drugs and engage in other unsafe practices such as unlicensed driving and driving without a seatbelt.*

THE FACTS

What is it?

While not everyone agrees about how aggressive driving should be defined, it is normally taken to include such behaviours as:

Minor:

- Shouting abuse
- Making obscene gestures
- Flicking lights on and off to get other drivers to move out of the way
- Deliberately braking or slowing suddenly to irritate others
- Giving a prolonged blast of the horn deliberately
- Driving too close behind another vehicle

Severe:

- Pursuing another vehicle
- Swerving in front of another vehicle
- Trying to run another vehicle off the road
- Attempting to stop another vehicle
- Deliberately bumping another vehicle
- Getting out and approaching another road user
- Damaging or attempting to damage a vehicle

- Assaulting or attempting to assault another road user (ie. pedestrians, cyclists and other drivers).

What do we know about it?

Research has helped us to understand that:

- Aggressive driving is linked with high levels of driving anger and/or general hostility.⁵
- Aggressive drivers may also suffer from disorders such as conduct disorder, ADHD or intermittent explosive disorder.⁶
- Research suggests that aggressive driving varies in degree across cultures and is likely to differentially impact on cyclists and pedestrians.

What causes it?

The causes of aggressive driving are complex. Aggressive road user behaviour is often the result of the driver's frustration at being unable to progress unimpeded by traffic, but frustration can also be provoked by individual life events, emotional state, and driver behaviour. Some psychiatrists point to deep-rooted personal causes such as stress disorders

that lead to impaired judgment. Social scientists have tended to see a connection between societal problems and uncivil or violent forms of driving behaviour.

"Road rage"

This is *not* the same as aggressive driving. Road rage is a term used to describe violence associated with motor vehicle use. It refers only to the most severe form of driving aggression (ie. assault/attempted assault). Though incidents of this type are severe, fortunately they are also uncommon. Surveys of drivers consistently show that only between 2 and 5% of drivers report being assaulted or attacked by another driver.

TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE

Tips for reducing your own aggressive driving:

- Remember that getting angry at someone may make you feel worse than you do already.
- Don't get into your car in an emotional state (angry, upset, aggressive, distracted) that may affect your driving or patience with other people.



- Remember that it is not someone else's fault that you are running late.
- Consider how you may feel after you calm down.
- Be aware of the consequences for the person you harass. They may feel upset, frightened, and unsure about driving alone. There may even be small children in the car who do not understand what is going on.

Avoiding becoming a victim

If you're being hassled by another driver, try not to react. Avoid making eye contact and do not accelerate, brake, or swerve suddenly.

- If a driver continues to hassle you or you think you are being followed, lock your door and drive on to the nearest police station or busy place for help.
- When stopped in traffic, leave enough space to pull out from behind the car you are following.
- If someone tries to get into your car, attract attention with your horn.
- Do not be tempted to start a fight and do not be tempted to carry any sort of weapon. It may only provoke a potential assailant and could end up in his or her hands.

Penalties for aggressive driving

If you or another driver are driving aggressively, the offending vehicle's registration number can be passed to the police along with an official report. Aggressive driving penalties may include a fine, loss of demerit points or licence disqualification. Assault, "reckless driving" and "intentionally causing serious injury" are criminal offences and serious incidents may involve a jail term.

CARRS-Q'S WORK IN THIS AREA

CARRS-Q has an active research program examining aggressive driving, including:

1. Where does driver aggression begin and end? The on and off-road factors associated with aggressive driving. This project:
 - explores the nature of aggressive driving in Queensland;
 - explores the person-related and situational factors contributing to aggressive driving behaviour by young drivers;
 - addresses the subsequent displacement of aggression to and from the on-road environment;
 - develops a model of aggressive driving behaviour; and
 - informs the design of appropriate driver education modules.
2. Developing and testing a comprehensive model of aggressive driving. This project:
 - examines triggers for aggressive driving, thoughts and emotions experienced during aggressive driving incidents and driver aggressive responses to on-road events;
 - further develops the model of aggressive driving being developed at CARRS-Q; and
 - tests the model using ordinary drivers and the CARRS-Q advanced driving simulator.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Further research on the contexts for aggressive or risky driving.
- The development of an effective public education campaign.
- The development of a driver education intervention for repeat

aggressive drivers.

- Further research on effective enforcement countermeasures.
- Road engineering improvements to reduce driver frustration and improve victim safety.
- The development of intelligent transport systems applications.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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