Friends looking out for friends as an intervention strategy for young adults’ risky driving

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INTRODUCTION

The young adult age group is at the highest risk of road trauma [1]. Further, the motor vehicle crash (MVC) risk for young adult drivers typically increases with the presence of a passenger [2]. While traditionally road safety strategies have focused on changing the driver there may be considerable opportunity to improve safety by developing passenger safety interventions. In particular, encouraging friends to actively intervene to reduce the likelihood of risky driving (e.g. speeding, drink driving or drug driving) and alcohol use.

The aim of this study was to undertake a review of intervening behaviour in risky driving situations. It includes the situations in which it is likely or unlikely to occur, factors associated with individuals who intervene and any evaluated programs that make use of such strategies.

METHODS

There were two parts to this research; (1) a systematic review of the literature on intervening and (2) a quantitative study examining young adults’ reports of intervening.

1. Systematic Review

A systematic review was undertaken to examine intervening and protective behaviour of passengers. A search was undertaken of Safetlylit, Medline, PsycInfo, CINAHL and ERIC. The search revealed 4822 articles using the search terms (intervene*, protect*, prosocial, social responsibility) and (driv*, passenger, car, road, transport*). These articles were then examined for those related to road safety and intervening behaviour [3].

2. Quantitative Study

Participants were 247 first year psychology students enrolled at the Queensland University of Technology. They were 32% male and aged between 17 to 25 years (mean age = 20.1 years).

Method and Procedure. A pen-and-paper survey was distributed in a lecture that examined participants’ demographic information and experiences of intervening behaviour (related to friends’ binge drinking, speeding, drink driving, drug driving).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the systematic review found a number of factors associated with intervening. Interveners were more likely to be female, older, generally took less risks themselves and disapproved of risk-taking. They were also more often exposed to MVCs and education campaigns. The individuals who were driving in, or about to drive in, a risky manner themselves took more risks in life.

In the context of the risky driving situation, intervention occurred when the intervener knew the driver, perceived danger, felt capable to intervene, had consumed less alcohol, felt a moral obligation to intervene, and had consulted others (regardless of opinion).

Intervention also included persuading, interfering, planning ahead and threatening. The behaviour might also include talking to the driver, affirming positive behaviour and ending the friendship. Efforts to intervene were considered more effective if they were strong and forceful (compared with suggestions, pleas or requests).

There were a few programs that had attempted to encourage intervening behaviour; Skills for Preventing Injury in Youth [4], Speak Out[5], Protecting You/ Protecting Me[6], and some advertising strategies (e.g. ‘friends don’t let friends drink and drive’)[7].

Quantitative Study

Between 56 and 85% of students intervened in risky behaviours (see Figures 1 and 2).

CONCLUSIONS

The results provide valuable information for road safety strategies associated with passengers. They showed young people do intervene in their friends’ risky driving behaviours and that there is potential to improve and encourage such behaviours by tapping into a variety of strategies that have previously shown to relate to intervening behaviour. Road safety strategies thus might focus on passengers as a way in which to reduce MVCs and associated injuries and death among young people.

REFERENCES

3. Please contact the first author for review references.

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