



ROAD RAGE

Bhoomika J

U11GT21C0758

I Year BCom- Second Semester

Government First Grade College, Tumkur -572104

bhoomika977@gmail.com

Ph.no: 8105188805

ABSTRACT

Road rage is a form of aggressive behaviour by drivers on roadways. The paper addresses two questions: firstly, to what extent is road rage related to driver perceptions, characteristics and background? Secondly, how do drivers exhibit road rage?

Recent media speculation implies that some drivers are more susceptible to road rage than others. For example, one commercial study indicated that women are increasingly the perpetrators of road rage. Although research of this kind makes good media headlines, there has been little serious scientific attention on this phenomenon. While the potential impacts of road rage are unknown, its major implication for road safety for drivers and others using roadways is apparent. Careful investigation into road rage may provide greater insight into the contributing factors of specific types of road accidents culpable driving. It may also lead to the development of enhanced coping strategies for professional drivers. The focus of this paper is on firstly, the motivating and activating context of road rage and secondly, a theoretical perspective on roadway aggression and the diffusion of this form of travel behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

How prevalent is road rage in the 1990s compared to previous decades? Judging by the intense media focus, it could be assumed that its prevalence is high. For example in 1997, there were 82 references to road rage in the Sydney Morning Herald. About 25 per cent of these actually referred to the phenomenon of road rage itself, with the remainder concerned with book titles, video games etc. (SMH, 1996 1997). Undoubtedly there is an increased usage of the term 'road rage' if today's media references are compared to even a few years ago: 30 references in 1996, three in 1995 and negligible references earlier than 1994. Increased usage is also supported by the new entry in the Macquarie Dictionary (1997) in which road rage is defined as 'uncontrollable violent behaviour towards another motorist resulting from the tensions and frustrations of driving'. This paper seeks to address the extent that the increased usage of the term road rage is actually a reflection of what is happening on the roads.

ROAD RAGE: THE 'WHAT'?

Violence on the road has been an object of study for over thirty years. Whitlock (1971) and others (Bennett 1965 and Raphael 1967) reported on road violence, defining it as drivers who use their vehicle to express aggressive behaviour contributing to violence on the road. These studies link

aggressive driving behaviour with a high rate of alcohol or drug abuse, personality-type, work, home and environmental stressors leading to impulsiveness and loss of temper. Underlying these studies is a suggestion of a lack of premeditation to induce harm to others while driving a vehicle. While the presumption of lack of premeditation associated with aggressive driving behaviour existed in the past in Australia, legislation introduced to manage road rage suggests otherwise. In July 1997, the New South Wales Parliament sought to redress this presumption by introducing a Traffic and Crimes Amendment Act (1997 No 75) with respect to menacing and predatory driving. Under Section 4AA of the Act, menacing driving refers to a person who drives a vehicle with the intent to threaten person by person injury or damage to property.

Under Section 51A of the Act, predatory driving refers to the driver of a vehicle who, while in pursuit of or travelling near another vehicle, engages in a course of conduct that causes or threatens an impact involving the other vehicle and intends by that course of conduct to cause a person in the other vehicle actual bodily harm.

In summary under the NSW legislation, road rage refers to the intent to definition is in contrast to the Macquarie Dictionary (1997) definition where 'intent' is not assumed. It is interesting to note that the legislation introduced into NSW Parliament (referred to above) was passed on the same day as both sides of government read it with little disagreement. This unusual event of being read twice and passed into legislation on the same day suggests a perception about the increased incidence of road rage by politicians and indirectly, the community.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ROAD RAGE

The perception of increased road rage may be linked to an increased perception of violence generally in the Australian community over which there continues to be much speculation in the media as well as by community leaders (NSW Police Commissioner 1998). For example in New Zealand, the police have conducted an exploratory study of 16 cases of road aggression. They reported that those drivers who vent their frustration in acts of aggression are likely to demonstrate a lack of personal restraint in other areas of their life, with 73 per cent of those surveyed having previous criminal convictions (ITE 1997).

The perception of violence in the community In contrast to the increased perception of violence the homicide rate in Australia has not changed over the past 20 years and has declined overall since the early 1900s (Chappell & Egger 1995). In New South Wales, there has been a marginal increase in both homicide (0.2 per cent in 1988 and 0.3 per cent in 1997) and suicide (1.4 per cent in 1988 compared to 1.7 per cent in 1997) (ABS 1300.1 and 1301.1). However since the early 1970s in Australia, the rates of various types of non-fatal violence, that is assault, sexual assault (lowest in NSW) and robbery (second highest in NSW), have increased sharply. This phenomenon is partially explained firstly by an heightened willingness of to report such incidents today due to enhanced data collection methodologies, especially when it occurs within the family (Chappell 1995). And secondly, it is a fact that most perpetrators of homicide and violence are known to their victims (Chappell 1995). Overall, these findings do not support a large increase in random acts of homicide or violence. Moreover, it is suggested that human aggressive interactions are statistically rare events compared to kind and cooperative ones (Baenninger 1991).

ROAD SAFETY

The increased perception of road rage may be linked to the perceived problem of road safety in Australia in both human and monetary terms. After all, road mortality and morbidity in Australia are significant community problems, despite a 47 per cent decline in fatalities over the last 25 years. The decline in road fatalities has occurred at the same time as a 42 per cent increase in population (from 12.7 million to 18.1 million) 118 per cent increase in the number of registered vehicles (from 4.9 to 10.7 million) (Road Facts 1996). In 1996, there were 1,977 persons killed in 1,775 road crashes (FORS 1996). The road toll in 1996 represented 3.6 per cent of total deaths, distributed differently for men (4.7 per cent of total deaths) and for women (2.5 per cent of total deaths) (ABS 3303.0). Similarly in New South Wales, the road toll has declined from 1301.1). Among the potential factors that contribute directly or indirectly to road mortality and morbidity are the effects on driving behaviour of alcohol and drug usage, fatigue, concentration and attention span as well as a range of physiological factors shown in.

CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of road rage was not evident in this study in that drivers generally did not report either a high incidence of aggressive driving behaviour, driving anger, nor negative driving outcomes. Most drivers also reported a positive general mood, low anxiety and balanced control suggesting that their off-road behaviour was similar to on- road behaviour.

The reason for a low incidence of reporting on road rage may be due to firstly, the limitations of the study itself. The paper is based on a study with a limited response rate. partially explained by the complexity of a self-administered questionnaire. Secondly, perceptions of road rage reflected by the media may be based on a small sample of publicised case studies manifesting extreme behaviour (eg. physical assault, vehicle damage) and not mirror the experience of most drivers. While there is evidence in the current study that some drivers engage in horn-blowing, flashing lights, gesturing or shouting, this type of discourteous behaviour has been exhibited by drivers long before the term 'road rage' was coined.

Moreover, discourteous behaviour may be a sign of increasing pressures and demands of working in a complex society which is spilling over into driving behaviour, as increasing number of people see their vehicle as their prime place of work. It is important to note that the majority of non-bus drivers are sales representatives using their car as an office between making calls to clients. Further, this study questions the definition of road rage and the extent that this term should be preserved for extreme forms of driver assault and vehicle damage.