

# **Analysing the inability to focus on the driving task in young males, un-experienced and offender drivers**

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Adult men, young people and inexperienced drivers are an issue in road accident data. Age, experience and gender appear to be determining factors in accident rates. Young men are more likely to be involved in risky behaviours because they perceive less risk in situations like driving under the influence of alcohol or talking on the phone while driving. Experienced drivers are more capable of detecting road hazards than inexperienced drivers. Offender drivers show significantly higher levels in driving angrily, seeking sensation, and being aggressive and impulsive. Impulsiveness has a cognitive/attentional dimension, defined as the inability to focus on the tasks at hand and cognitive instability involving thought insertions and racing thoughts.

In this study we analysed the relationship between experience, risk perception, sensitivity to punishment, sensitivity to reward, impulsivity, and driver profile (offender or non-offender). These constructs have so far been studied in a relatively diffuse form, as an impulsivity and risky decision-making paradigm (Balloon Analogue Risk Task, BART), a measurement of self-reported perceived risk (Domain-Specific Risk-Taking Scale-Spain, DOSPERT) and a measurement of sensitivity to punishment and sensitivity to reward (Sensitivity to Punishment and Sensitivity to Reward Questionnaire, SPSRQ-20). The aim of this study was a better understanding of the variables that could be relevant in reducing the accident rate.

A sample of 220 drivers, offenders and non-offenders, aged between 18 and 60 years, from driving schools, training centres and universities, was gathered for this study. The main results demonstrated that inexperienced drivers show a risk-underestimation pattern, with higher impulsivity and higher insensitivity to punishment. This pattern was also found in both young and adult male participants. Regarding non-offender drivers, driving experience is related to increased risk perception. Adult men perceive less risk than women in different situations. It seems that factors such as age, gender and driving experience are more closely related to impulsivity in the BART task, since no differences were observed between offenders and non-offenders with regard to impulsivity. Finally, offenders showed less sensitivity to punishment compared to non-offenders. This may be due to an adaptation to punishment from authorities. Non-offenders are less exposed to these punishments, making them more sensitive to it.