

Road Traffic Injuries among Young Drivers in Oman

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During the last year and early this year, Oman witnessed a substantial fall in road traffic crashes and injuries.¹ This could be ascribed to many agents, which include stringent enforcement efforts and promoting awareness in the community. Even then, to sustain this decline and to further reduce crashes, a deeper understanding of the problem is needed. For example, young Omanis aged 16 to 25 years old make up around 20% of the Omani population, yet these young drivers account for over 31% of the road crash related fatalities and 37% of the road crash related injuries.¹ This overrepresentation of young road users in traffic crashes and fatalities is intolerable. Driving is the prominent mode of mobility for young Omanis, given the lack of an efficient public transportation system in the country. Although it is widely known that road infrastructure in the country and vehicle safety standards have greatly improved over time, still an increasing number of young drivers are involved in fatal and injury related road crash. International research reports that young drivers are aggressive on the road and more easily distracted while driving.² Omani research has also shown that young drivers report higher levels of risky behavior in comparison to wider community of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) drivers and other international samples.³ Several researches have recently focused on the social environment as one of the contributing factors influencing the driving behavior of young drivers, especially the role of models.^{2,4,5} However, to date there is very limited research into young Omani drivers and the personal, behavioral and environmental dimensions underlying their driving behaviors and associated decision making.

Young drivers are particularly influenced by whom they have interacted with, and current research in Oman and overseas has identified the increasing role and importance of peers and parents on a young driver behavior. Importantly, the influence can be both positive and negative. In particular, the current Oman based research about young drivers is starting to uncover the seminal role of parents as both a role model and influence in promoting safe driving behavior. Through following the significant individuals

(i.e. parents) driving style, young drivers may model their driving behavior and adopt their driving attributes especially during the process of learning to drive.⁶ Thus, parents take a highly significant part in the induction of a specific behaviors and attitudes among young drivers, and in the continuity of that behavior through direct or indirect reinforcement.⁷

The influence of role models in young driver behavior is a growing research area. One of the scientific behavioral theories used to explore this area of young driver road safety is Akers' Social Learning Theory (ASLT). ASLT can explain several risky driving behaviors among young drivers as a consequence of the social reinforcement.^{5,7}

Currently, research is being conducted in Oman to investigate the interactive effect of the person, behavior and environment factors upon the hazardous driving behaviors among new drivers in Oman. This research is part of broad research project currently being conducted by the Center of Accident Research and Road Safety-Queensland (CARRS-Q) from Queensland University of Technology (Australia), with grant funds from The Research Council (TRC) and collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University and Royal Oman Police. This and other current TRC funded research on road safety in Oman, is shedding new light on driver's behavior in Oman and will assist in designing and implementing effective road safety strategies in the country.

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