

Aggressive Driving and Road Rage

INTRODUCTION

Aggressive driving and road rage are perceived to be serious threats to public safety and contribute to a substantial number of road traffic crashes each year. Previous work by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (AAAFTS) found that in 2014, more than 78% of drivers reported engaging in at least one aggressive driving behavior in the past year, underscoring the high prevalence of such risky behaviors. Changes in driving patterns, lifestyles, and technology (both inside and outside the vehicle) in the past decade may have changed the types of behaviors that road users perceive as aggressive, as well as the causes and contributing factors of aggressive driving behaviors. This study updated previous AAAFTS research on aggressive driving, further explored the etiology of aggressive driving behaviors and related attitudes, and examined how the concepts of aggressive driving and road rage have evolved over time.

METHODOLOGY

This study took a three-part approach. Part 1 consisted of a comprehensive literature review and discussions with academic experts. Part 2 involved eight focus group discussions with a total of 53 drivers who admitted to engaging in aggressive driving or road rage behaviors, and subsequent thematic analysis of the qualitative data. Part 3 designed a bespoke questionnaire to measure attitudes towards and engagement in aggressive driving and road rage, which was administered to a nationally representative sample of 3,020 drivers, aged 16 and older, recruited from a probability-based panel. Quantitative analyses examined the prevalence and correlates of aggressive driving and road rage attitudes and behaviors.

KEY FINDINGS

- The literature review identified many individual, vehicle, and situational factors associated with aggressive driving and road rage. These factors operate at different levels of influence, including the individual level (knowledge, skills, attitudes); relational (family, friends, social networks); and community level (the built and social environment).

TECHNICAL REPORT:

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DOWNLOAD REPORT

ABOUT THE AAA FOUNDATION FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

Founded in 1947, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety in Washington, D.C., is a nonprofit, publicly supported charitable research and educational organization dedicated to saving lives by preventing traffic crashes and reducing injuries when crashes occur. Funding for this research was provided by voluntary contributions from AAA/CAA and their affiliated motor clubs, individual members, AAA-affiliated insurance companies, and other organizations or sources.

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- Qualitative analyses of focus group data identified seven key themes in behaviors that drivers consider to be aggressive: **putting others at risk, getting ahead, stealing space, controlling other driver behavior, expressions of displeasure, provoking reactions, and violence.**
- While anger and frustration were the emotions most commonly associated with aggressive driving and road rage in the literature, in focus group discussions drivers also spoke of anxiety, fear, and pleasure in their experiences of aggressive driving and road rage.
- Drivers perceived that they were generally able to cope with feelings of anger while driving unless “triggered,” which could lead to more violent behaviors, including those that have been traditionally considered road rage in the literature.
- Drivers reported many different motivations for driving aggressively including getting to destinations more quickly, perceived threats to safety, claiming control over sometimes chaotic driving environments, educating other drivers on the correct way to behave, retaliating against perceived slights, and punishing other drivers for bad behavior.
- Quantitative analyses of survey data revealed extremely high levels of self-reported engagement in aggressive behaviors among American drivers. The survey measured 21 behaviors identified from the literature review, expert panel discussion, and focus groups with drivers. Across all behaviors, 96% of drivers reported engaging in aggressive driving or road rage behaviors at least once in the previous year.
- Analyses investigated the prevalence of aggressive driving by themes identified in the focus group discussions. The most prevalent behaviors were those categorized as either *trying to get ahead* (92%) and *putting others at risk* (92%). In the previous year, 11% of drivers engaged in *violent* behaviors.
- Associations between individual factors and high levels of engagement in aggressive driving mirror findings from the literature review, with higher prevalence rates among younger and male drivers.
- There was evidence of many associations between indicators of how drivers feel about their vehicle and high levels of engagement in aggressive driving.
- Road etiquette and manners appear to be a protective factor against aggressive driving. Drivers who indicated that good manners were important to them were less likely to have high levels of engagement in aggressive driving.
- The most salient predictor of high engagement in aggressive driving was aggressive driving culture, i.e. the extent to which other drivers in your area engage in aggressive driving behaviors.