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In the driver's seat

This report is the product of the collaboration between the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria, and the Transport Accident Commission of Victoria. The study used data gathered from the Australian Temperament Project (ATP) to identify trends in young adult driving behaviour and factors associated with, and pathways to, unsafe driving behaviours among this age group.

Australian Institute of Family Studies

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is Australia's national centre for research and information on families. Now in its 25th year, the Institute's research on issues that affect family stability and well-being play a key role in the development of family policy and informed debate in Australia. The Institute is a statutory authority established by the Australian Government in February 1980.

Royal Automobile Club of Victoria

The Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV) represents over 1.3 million members. The organisation was founded in 1903 and is Victoria's peak motoring organisation. RACV is responsible for informing members of issues relating to motoring and advocating on behalf of members on a range of motoring and safety issues.

Transport Accident Commission of Victoria

The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) is the sole provider of personal injury insurance for transport accidents in Victoria. It funds medical care and support services for people injured in transport accidents. A key role of the TAC is to invest in road safety, primarily via public education campaigns. The TAC has worked closely with other road safety partners to achieve a significant reduction in death and injury on Victoria's roads. A state government owned statutory authority; the TAC was established in 1987.

Australian Temperament Project

The Australian Temperament Project is a large longitudinal study of children's development which began in 1983 with the enrolment of a representative sample of 2443 infants and their families from urban and rural areas of Victoria. The study investigates pathways to psychosocial adjustment from childhood to adulthood and the influence of personal, family and environmental factors. Since early in 2000, the Australian Institute of Family Studies has been collaborating with researchers from the University of Melbourne and the Royal Children's Hospital in this ongoing research project.

IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT UNDERSTANDING YOUNG ADULTS' DRIVING BEHAVIOUR



A report on the ATP Young Drivers Study from the collaborative partnership between the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria and the Transport Accident Commission of Victoria

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with
Ann Sanson, Samantha Cockfield, Anne Harris,
Warren Harrison and Allison McIntyre



AUSTRALIAN TEMPERAMENT PROJECT

A study of development from infancy to adulthood



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Foreword

Understanding the processes by which young Australians develop into safe or risky drivers is crucial in increasing road safety, minimising harm and maximising positive outcomes for our young people. This report focuses on the personal, family and social characteristics that are linked to differing patterns of driving behaviour, while acknowledging the salient role of situational, mechanical and legal factors that influence driving behaviour.

The report is the culmination of a collaborative project between the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria, and the Transport Accident Commission of Victoria.

The focus of the collaboration was the longitudinal community study, the Australian Temperament Project (ATP), which itself is a collaboration between researchers from the Institute, the University of Melbourne and the Royal Children's Hospital. The ATP contains 13 waves of data covering many aspects of life from infancy to early adulthood, collected from a representative sample of 2,443 children and parents.

The collaborative project reported here began in 2001 with the realisation that the forthcoming ATP data collection at 19-20 years would provide a valuable opportunity to examine the learner driver and current driving experiences of young people who had recently become licensed drivers (the legal licensing age for most participants was 18 years of age). As a result, the *ATP Young Drivers Study* formed part of the ATP's 2002 data collection.

Among the major findings emerging from the ATP Young Drivers Study was that risky driving was still quite prevalent, with speeding and driving when tired found to be particularly common. These behaviours continue to be clear targets for road safety efforts. Encouragingly, certain behaviours such as drink driving and failure to use seatbelts were less common, suggesting that road safety efforts aimed at these behaviours have been effective.

The report also highlights the relevance of personal characteristics to driving behaviour. The small group who later became high risky drivers had been consistently more aggressive, hyperactive, and possessed poorer attention capacities and lower social skills from mid childhood than other young drivers. The report suggests that, in addition to concentrating on skill development, road safety initiatives and driver education programs could be extended to focus on the links between a person's individual style and driving behaviour.

Some high risky drivers had a history of problem behaviour, especially antisocial behaviour and substance use. For these young people, risky driving may be a manifestation of a risky lifestyle. These findings further reinforce current efforts to help children make the best start in life, which may curb the later development of a range of problem behaviours, including risky driving.

On behalf of the three organisations participating in this collaboration, I commend the report *In the Driver's Seat: Understanding Young Adults' Driving Behaviour*, and am confident that it will be of widespread interest, value and relevance to policy makers, practitioners, and the broader community.

Professor Alan Hayes

Director
Australian Institute of Family Studies

Acknowledgments

The authors of this report would like to thank the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria and the Transport Accident Commission of Victoria for providing the opportunity to undertake this collaborative project, which we believe has provided interesting and valuable Australian findings that can inform the development of more effective road safety strategies and policies in Australia.

The leadership and guidance provided over the lifetime of the Australian Temperament Project study by its leading investigators – Associate Professor Ann Sanson (Department of Psychology, University of Melbourne), Professor Margot Prior (Departments of Psychology and Paediatrics, University of Melbourne), Professor Frank Oberklaid (Centre for Community Child Health, Melbourne’s Royal Children’s Hospital) and Associate Professor John W. Toumbourou (Centre for Adolescent Health, Melbourne’s Royal Children’s Hospital, and Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne) – is particularly acknowledged.

Finally, the authors thank the young people, parents and teachers who have participated in the Australian Temperament Project. Without their loyalty and commitment, this research would not have been possible.

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