

Family and friends set the speedo

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If your family and friends approve of speeding, then chances are you are more likely to plant your foot on the accelerator, a study by Queensland University of Technology has found.

Judy Fleiter, from QUT's Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland (CARRS-Q), said irrespective of age and gender, drivers who perceived their family and friends as approving of speeding, admitted to speeding more frequently.

"It is not only young drivers who are influenced by their peers or their families to speed, nor is it just males," she said.

Ms Fleiter said previous research suggested that on the road younger drivers and males were more susceptible to peer and family pressure, than older drivers and females.

"This is part of the reason why younger drivers are over-represented in crashes," she said.

"But my findings overall showed that it didn't matter what gender you were or how old you were, if friends and family approved of speeding you were more likely to speed."

Ms Fleiter's study, which was part of her honours degree, was conducted with 320 drivers in south-east Queensland aged 16-79 and looked at the influences on self-reported speeding.

"The study found drivers report more frequent speeding when they perceived greater approval of speeding by family and friends," she said.

"While the impact of friends was found to be the most important influence in this study, it also highlights the role that family members can play.

"Parents have the opportunity to influence the safety of their children by the example they set."

Ms Fleiter said that in further research she had conducted, one young male said, "Growing up, dad always drove faster than mum, so I always thought males drove faster than females".

She said another driver, a man over 50, said "I just assumed everyone speeds".

"The results of this study highlight the impact that social influences appear to have on speeding behaviour and reinforce the need to better understand how influential groups can be harnessed to promote road safety," she said.

"Overall, this research demonstrates that people need to be aware of the way that they can have an influence on other people's behaviour."

And with speed continuing to be one of the major killers on Queensland roads, Ms Fleiter, said it was crucial to understand the reasons that push drivers to exceed the limit.

"During 2005 there were 68 fatalities as a result of speed-related crashes on Queensland roads - representing 21 per cent of Queensland's road toll," she said.

"Speeding also contributes to numerous crashes resulting in serious injury and increases the severity of crashes caused by other factors such as drink-driving and fatigue."

Ms Fleiter's study has led her to undertake a PhD investigating further the factors that influence drivers to speed.

"As part of my PhD research project I will be talking one-on-one with motorists about their driving behaviour and examining the range of factors that influence their decision to speed."

Source: Queensland University of Technology

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