

Children more distracting to drivers than mobile phones

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Drivers often do not consider their children to be a distraction.

In a first-of-its-kind study, Monash University researchers have found children are 12 times more distracting to a driver than talking on a mobile phone while at the wheel.

The researchers, from the Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) found the average parent takes their eyes off the road for three minutes and 22 seconds during a 16-minute trip.

Associate Professor Judith Charlton and Dr Sjaan Koppel at MUARC used cars fitted with a discrete recording system which monitored the [driving](#) behaviour of 12 families over three weeks. The families had an average of two children, between 1-8 years of age.

The study analysed ninety-two trips for any potentially distracting activities undertaken by the driver. This included all activities that distracted the driver or competed for their attention while driving; including looking away from the forward roadway for more than two seconds while the vehicle was in motion.

Associate Professor Charlton said while the risks of distraction during driving are becoming increasingly well known – drivers often don't consider their own children to be a distraction and this highlights the need for education about the risks of focusing on their children rather than the road.

"Previous research has shown that, compared with driving alone, dialling a [mobile phone](#) while driving is associated with 2.8 times the crash risk, and talking or listening while driving is associated with 1.3 times the [crash risk](#)," Associate Professor Charlton said.

"The costs of distracted driving are undeniable. One major and previously unrecognised distraction is kids in the backseat."

In the Monash study, drivers were observed engaging in potentially distracting activities in 90 of the 92 trips. The most frequent types of distractions included turning to look at the child in the rear seat or watching the rear-view mirror (76.4 per cent), engaging in conversation with the child (16 per cent), assisting the child (7 per cent) and playing with the child (1 per cent).

The study found that the presence of a front seat passenger did not significantly affect the way in which drivers engaged in potentially distracting child occupant-related activities, both in terms of frequency and duration.

One area that may assist in reducing [driver distraction](#) is correct restraint

of children in their car seats. The researchers found [children](#) were in the incorrect position for over 70 per cent of the journey time.

Provided by Monash University

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