Centre for Accident Research
& Road Safety - Queensland
(CARRS-Q)

State of the Road

A fact sheet of the Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland

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- ***"Hooning" refers to the act of using a vehicle in an irresponsible and dangerous manner in public places.[1]***
- ***Street racing and hooning behaviours have attracted growing community concern in Australia, and internationally, over recent years.***
- ***All Australian states and territories, and New Zealand, have now implemented "anti-hooning" countermeasures, typically involving impounding the vehicles of offenders for increasing periods of time for subsequent offences, ultimately leading to vehicle forfeiture.[2]***

THE FACTS

What is 'hooning'?

- From both a popular culture and legislative point of view, "hooning" in the Australian context encompasses a broader group of behaviours than illegal street racing.[2]
- Over recent years, the term "hooning" has been used to refer to antisocial driving behaviours such as[2]:
  - "illegal street" racing - Illegal street racing may be highly organised or spontaneous in nature. Highly organised races are typically staged at night in industrial areas, with start and finish lines marked a quarter of a mile apart (the traditional distance for drag races). Some groups use walkie-talkies and even police tape and false signs to block the traffic for the duration of the race. Others may use rolling road blocks to stage a race in the middle of a multi-laned road. Rolling road blocks refer to the practice of a large number of vehicles travelling as a convoy across all lanes of a road, slowing or blocking the progress of other vehicles until a clear "racetrack" is created for some distance. Spontaneous illegal street racing refers to impromptu, one-time races between persons who do not know one another (eg. drivers stopped at traffic signals on a straight stretch of a double-laned road may race, with the traffic signals providing a starting signal);
  - "burn outs" - when the rear tyres of a vehicle are spun until they heat and smoke;
  - "donuts" - when the driver turns the front tyres until the steering is fully locked during a burn out, so that the car rotates and a circular (donut) pattern of tread marks remains on the road surface;
  - "drifting" - when a vehicle slides sideways through a turn taken at high speed;
  - unnecessary speed or acceleration; and
  - "speed trials" - when the acceleration and top-speed capability of a vehicle and/or the skill of its driver are tested, usually on a straight road of a set distance, sometimes to establish or break records.

Who 'hoons'?

- The label of "hoon" is sometimes applied to car enthusiasts, drivers of modified vehicles, or to young drivers in general. However those involved in the car enthusiast scene are not a homogeneous group, and only a minority of sub-groups appear to be truly dangerous. Drivers who engage in hooning behaviours can be anyone in any vehicle.[2]
- A CARRS-Q investigation of 967 hooning offenders involved in 983 hooning offences during the period 2005-06[2], found that the hooning offenders were primarily:
  - young people aged under 25 years (76.9%) (50.8% were aged 17-20 years);
  - Caucasian (90.7%);
  - males (97.3%)
  - in terms of occupation (where known), the most common major codes among hooning offenders were tradespersons and related workers, not working, and labourers and related workers. These three groups accounted for more than 75% of hooning offenders for whom occupation was known.
  - The number of females attending hooning events is increasing.[2]

- In contrast to the popular belief that all hooning offenders are young drivers, almost one quarter of hooning offenders are aged over 25.[2]

A profile of 'hooning'

- CARRS-Q's Queensland investigation[2] found that most hooning offences:
  - occurred on public streets (95.4%); involved causing unnecessary noise or smoke (eg. burn outs, donuts, fish tails; 66.9%); or engaging in an illegal street race or speed trial (19.4%);
  - primarily occurred between Thursday and Sunday (although this may reflect enforcement; 76.9%).
  - 80.5% of vehicles involved in hooning offences were cars or station wagons. Contrary to popular belief, hooning offences need not occur in modified street machines, but rather in common vehicles such as Holden Commodores and Ford Falcons. Almost two thirds of vehicles involved in hooning offences were Holdens or Fords (63.9%). Although these are the most common two makes of vehicles on Australian roads (Motor Vehicle Census, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004), Holdens are over-represented in hooning offences (47.4% vs. 19.1%). Similarly, Nissans are driven in 12.9% of hooning offences, but make up only 6.9% of registered vehicles in Australia.
  - Approximately half of the vehicles involved in hooning offences were 10 to 20 years old (50.5%). In both Queensland and Australia, the average age of registered passenger vehicles is 10 years, while for all registered vehicles the average age is 10.3 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).
  - Only 64.5% of the vehicles were registered to the offender.
- Australian research has found that hooning offenders tend to be involved in the scene for only two or three years. This may substantiate the 'maturing-out' effect of hooning in the mid-twenties.[1]

Source: Drive.com.au

Why is hooning a problem?

- It may be argued that only illegal street racing or speed trial offences pose a road safety risk, due to the speeds attained by involved vehicles, while hooning offences involving unnecessary noise or smoke are better considered a public amenity issue. However, concurrent hooning offences are common. There are considerable potential risks to the hooning driver, passengers, bystanders, and property depending on the context or location of unnecessary noise or smoke offences, as these offences involve a vehicle that has lost traction with the road surface and is essentially out of the driver's control.
- Young people aged under 25 years are most likely to "hoon" and are also identified as the most 'at-risk' group on the roads in Australia.[1] Many factors are identified to contribute to this 'at risk' age group's over-representation in vehicle crashes, such as inexperience or lack of perception. Nevertheless, risky driving acts such as speeding, rapid lane changes and illegal street racing have been implicated in crashes and are behaviours synonymous with hooning. This supports the contention that hooning may be a crash risk factor for young people and a contributing factor to their over-representation in crashes.
- Hooning-related crashes may be difficult to quantify since specific hooning terms may not be used in all police recordings. Many hooning instances may go undetected and thus under-represented in crash records.[1]
- An analysis of hooning offences in Queensland found that 3.7% of the offence descriptions mentioned that the offence involved a crash.[6]
- Analysis of the traffic and crash histories of male offenders in the above study found that hooning offenders had significantly more traffic infringements, crashes, and licence sanctions in the previous three years than an age-matched random sample of male Queensland drivers, suggesting that drivers who engage in hooning behaviours can be considered risky drivers.[6]

Legislating against hooning offences

- The majority of hooning occurrences are monitored by traffic complaint systems and police enforcements made under anti-hoon legislation. There was a total of 5,325 complaints made by members of the public between 1999 to 2005 in Queensland.[1]
- In response to a growing number of community complaints regarding "hooning" behaviours and the potential for serious injury, Queensland's *Police Powers and Responsibilities Act* was amended in 2002 to give police the power to impound the vehicles of drivers committing prescribed hooning offences. These include: dangerous operation of a motor vehicle; careless driving of a motor vehicle; racing and speed trials on roads; and wilfully starting a vehicle, or driving a vehicle, in a way that makes unnecessary noise or smoke.[2]
- All Australian states and territories, and New Zealand, have now implemented "anti-hooning" countermeasures.

- Among other sanctions imposed (including fines, demerit points, and licence disqualification), the vehicles of drivers charged with an offence under the 2011 revision of Queensland's "anti-hooning" legislation are immediately impounded for 7 days for a first offence or 28 days for a second offence, and subsequent offences can result in an impoundment period of up to three months or forfeiture to the State.[7]
- Since the introduction of legislation in November 2002 and until the end of 2009, 5,470 vehicles have been impounded for hooning offences. Of these, 5,288 were held for a period of 48 hours for a first offence. A small proportion of impoundments (*n* = 208, 3.8%) were held for up to 3 months for a second offence, while 19 vehicles were forfeited to the state for a third (*n* = 17, 0.30%) or fourth (*n* = 2, 0.04%) offences.[8]

Challenges for legislation

- Decreasing the perceived rewards for hooning may prove quite difficult, as they are highly individualised.[5]
- Approximately half of the vehicles involved in hooning offences were 10 to 20 years old (50.5%), which is older than the average car on the road. This may have implications for the deterrent effect of vehicle sanctions, as these vehicles may be low in financial value.[2]
- More than one third of vehicles used in hooning offences are not registered to the offender.[2] This also has implications for the deterrent effect of vehicle sanctions, as these may not be applied to these drivers.
- Those who have successfully avoided punishment several times may come to think that they are immune to apprehension, decreasing their perceived risk of punishment.[5]
- Current anti-hoon legislation may need to be enforced at higher levels in order to achieve higher perceptions of punishment likelihood.[5] Simply enacting anti-hoon legislation may not be sufficient to deter hooning if individuals do not perceive the certainty of punishment as being sufficient to alter future willingness to take part in the behaviour.
- Research suggests the possibility that some drivers may flee in order to avoid being caught by police for a third hooning offence and losing their vehicles permanently.[4] As a police pursuit situation could be more dangerous than the hooning offence, it may be wise for police to follow up repeat offenders at a later stage to seize the driver's vehicle.

CARRS-Q'S WORK IN THIS AREA

- Qualitative exploratory study to examine the experiences and thoughts of local car enthusiasts.[3]
- Self-report research with young people to explore the prevalence, associated characteristics and crashes associated with hooning.[1,5]
- Quantitative analysis of Queensland hooning offence data to better understand the hooning problem.[2]
- Self-report research with people who engage in hooning behaviours in Queensland to explore the deterrent and other effects of vehicle impoundment laws for hooning from the perspective of the targeted driver.[4]
- Analysis of how Australian jurisdictions manage hooning behaviours.[9]
- Comparisons of the traffic and crash histories of hooning offenders to young drivers to explore whether people who engage in hooning can be considered generally risky drivers.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- As 'hooning' may lead to road crashes, further research into the phenomenon is warranted and recommended.
- Ongoing enhancement of crash and hooning offence data collection practices is recommended to enable targeted research.
- Future research should explore:
  - the nature of the problem.
  - the risks associated with the different types of hooning offences;
  - the identification and exploration of sub-groups of hooning offenders and offences;
  - the road safety implications of hooning behaviours through analysis of traffic and crash histories of hooning offenders, and comparisons between the crash involvement of hooning offenders and other known high-risk groups (eg. drink drivers, unlicensed drivers and young drivers); and
  - the ongoing evaluation of current approaches.

This fact sheet is a community service provided by CARRS-Q. Not all of the research included in this fact sheet was provided by CARRS-Q. For research authors, please see the reference list at the end of the document.

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The CARRS-Q vision is to decrease the local, national and international burden of trauma-related harm.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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