

# WHICH DRIVERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE DISTRACTED?

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No doubt the challenge of dealing with evolving vehicle technology is evidenced in the problems created – from a crash perspective – by way of DWD. Clearly, we need to understand more about the common denominators in driver distraction.

A new study finds that young men, people who drive more often, and extraverted or neurotic people are more likely to engage in driver distraction.

The study, published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, also finds that older women and those who feel they can control their distracted behaviour are less likely to report distraction.

According to estimates from the World Health Organization, more than one million people die in road traffic accidents each year. Driver distractions, including answering the phone or fiddling with the radio, are a factor in many accidents.

The risk of accidents increases dramatically after just two seconds of distraction. Thus understanding and reducing driver distraction will help save lives, researchers say.

Predicting and explaining distracted behaviours is difficult, as people often don't intend to reduce their focus on driving. Others may feel they have little control over it. There is no previous examination on the link between someone's attitudes and intentions regarding distracted driving and how often they are distracted during driving. In addition, the link between driver distraction and gender, age, and personality, is not completely understood.

Ole Johansson, a researcher at the Institute of Transport Economics in Norway, investigates these issues by collecting information on it. The sample comes from a large group of Norwegian high-school students and a group of Norwegian adults.

The surveys covered a variety of topics, including the frequency and type of distractions the participants experience during driving. It also looks at their attitudes and intentions around driver distractions, and their personalities.

The survey reveals that overall rates of driver distraction were low and that fiddling with the radio is the most common distractor. But some of the most prominent predictors of distraction were age and gender.

"Young men were among the most likely to report distraction," Johansson says. "Others more prone to distraction include those who drive often, and those with neurotic and extroverted personalities."

People who feel that distracted driving is more socially acceptable, or that it is largely beyond their control, are also more likely to report distracted driving.

However, older women and those who feel that they can control their distractive behaviour are less likely to report distraction.

The study also examines the effectiveness of an intervention to reduce distracted driving.

Participants chose plans to reduce their distracted behaviours. They did this by matching 'if' statements, such as 'if I am tempted to drive faster than the speed limit on the highway' with 'then' statements. 'Then' statements include items such as "'then I will remind myself that it is dangerous and illegal to do so.'

A control group was provided with information about driving distractions, but made no plans. A follow-up survey two weeks later measures driver distraction in the two groups.

Both groups show similar declines in driver distraction, meaning the intervention itself is not effective. Simply viewing material about distracted driving and completing the survey may have been enough for the participants to become more aware of their distractions, the researcher explains.

Johansson believes one key to successful future interventions lies in allowing the participants to devise their own plans. This is rather than choosing from a list, so that they can engage more.

Interventions can also focus on the needs of high-risk groups, he says. "Interventions to reduce driver distraction can focus on at-risk groups. These include young males with bad attitudes to driver distraction and low beliefs they can control their distraction," he concludes...