

Public enquiry on Social attitudes on (road) traffic risks

The research was initiated in cooperation with representatives of Traffic Police which, as main beneficial, wanted to know, in a scientific and wider manner, the main characteristics of Romanian drivers' conducts in traffic.

The goal of this study was to describe the car drivers' attitudes towards traffic risks. The outcomes will be used to guide the activities on road traffic education as well as those of supervision and control from the Traffic Police.

The study is a reiteration of a research conducted 2 years ago and has the same objectives as the previous survey: the measurement of the level to which traffic rules are followed by drivers, drivers' attitudes towards safety measures and traffic rules, and the identification of social and cultural factors which influence behavior in traffic. The researchers wanted, also, to find out how possible changes in the drivers' attitudes appeared in the meantime (between first and second enquiry).

The survey is an analysis and interpretation of data collected by applying a questionnaire on national level. The questionnaire applied in this study is an improved version of the one used in the previous research, in march 2008, which was also adapted from the SARTI questionnaire (...)

The results show that, at a general perception level, Romanian drivers seem to admit the seriousness of traffic accidents, placing this phenomenon on a high level of concern, close to other major social problems like criminality or the perspective of unemployment.

They also consider road traffic more and more difficult, due especially to traffic congestion and poorly maintained roads but also to drivers' behavior. ***Over half of the respondents stated that they are not feeling safe in traffic/when they drive***, the main reasons for the insecure condition were the high number of car accidents, the other drivers' behavior and the poorly maintained roads.

Although they admit the seriousness of car accidents issue, most of the questioned drivers consider that the main solution to improve road traffic would be ***infrastructure investments/improving the standards of roads***, while they admit in a lower proportion that need be for ***measures to regulate the drivers' behavior*** (penalties/punishments, higher standards in giving driver licenses, increase in the quality of the instruction, mobile radars and video supervision of traffic, increase in the number of traffic policemen) or safety measures/traffic regulations promoting safety (improving the road signs). The poor orientation toward those measures on driver behavior regulation could be explained through the significant number of respondents who admit that they display a ***risk behavior*** (speeding, following too closely to vehicles in front, use of cell phones without a hands free device) or serious risk behavior (drinking and driving, driving when tired, entering the intersection on the red light, overtaking other vehicles, priority issues related to other participants to the road traffic)

Although most of the questioned drivers admit that breaking speed limits significantly increases the risk of accidents or of being fined by the police and decreases the stability of the car and also the ability to control the vehicle, most of them exceed speed limits on certain roads as an adaptation to other cars' speed or in order to move faster. They oppose those risks some arguments to justify their habit of exceeding speed limits: thus, they think that exceeding speed limits with 10-20 km/h is a generalized fact or is not risky for a good driver.

The research reveals a similar attitude towards drinking and driving. At a theoretical level, most of the respondents admit the causal relationship between the alcohol consumption and the reduction in driving capacity but some of the drivers are convinced that a moderate quantity of alcohol cannot affect their performance. They consider that an emergency situation or short distances are enough reasons to dare to drive after drinking.

Generally, the demand for safety belt wear is respected outside the living area/ towns and especially on the motorways, where the higher speeds induce the perception of a higher risk. Contrary to this, in localities, few over half of the respondents admitted they wear safety belts regularly. The drivers seem to operate a connection between the perceived risk on a specific type of road and the utility of the seat belt. They prefer to wear the safety belt as a subjective necessity rather than as a conformation to the law. They act in a similar manner with their children when they take them by car: they are not concerned about the children's safety and do not secure them with seat belts, if they estimate a lower risk on a certain type of road or a certain trip.

Aggressive style in driving is a less recognized characteristic from most of the research participants. The highest score on the aggressive self perception scale had been obtained by young people (18-25 years old), drivers without a professional license who drive on duty/at work and owners of vehicles with high cylinder capacity.

Taking this into account, however, three quarters of the respondents declared that they felt aggressed in traffic through gestures, behaviors or overtaking schemes. Therefore, we can conclude that aggressive behavior is a widespread attitude with Romanian drivers , that they are aware of but very scarcely assumed.

- From the above data, certain driver types/categories showing an increased risk behavior could be outlined:
 - **young people (aged 18 to 25) ;**
 - **drivers without professional licenses who drive on duty/at work;**
 - **drivers who were involved in car accidents before.**