



Short communication

Emotional abilities as predictors of risky driving behavior among a cohort of middle aged drivers

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between emotional abilities and the influence of this relationship on self reported drivers' risky attitudes. The risky driving attitudes and emotional abilities of 177 future driving instructors were measured. The results demonstrate that risky attitudes correlate negatively with emotional abilities. Regression analysis showed that adaptability and interpersonal abilities explained the differences observed in the global risk attitude index. There were some differences in the specific risk factors. The variability observed in the speed and distraction and fatigue factors could also be explained by interpersonal and adaptability abilities. Nevertheless the tendency to take risks was explained by stress management and also interpersonal components. Emotional abilities have the weakest relation with alcohol and drugs factor, and in this case the variability observed was explained by the adaptability component. The results obtained highlight the importance take off including emotional abilities in prevention programs to reduce risky driving behaviors.

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1. Introduction

Traffic accidents constitute a global social and economic problem; millions of people die in traffic accidents every year (OECD, 2006). Car crashes and traffic injuries are the ninth leading cause of death in the world (WHO, 2009). In Spain, 3100 people were killed in road traffic accidents in 2007 (DGT, 2008). Spain's traffic control agency, Dirección General de Tráfico (DGT, 2008), estimates that 66% of drivers involved in fatal traffic accidents have committed traffic offenses; of all the accidents in 2007, 28% involved speeding, 30.97% involved alcohol and other drugs, and at least 37% involved driving while fatigued or distracted.

Recent research (Fernandes et al., 2007, 2010; Iversen, 2004) confirms that risky driving behavior has been a key contributor to road accidents (Elander et al., 1993). Risky behaviors associated with road accidents include speeding, drunk driving, driving while fatigued and not wearing seat belts (Fernandes et al., 2010). Examining certain variables associated with specific risky driving behaviors may explain individual differences in risk-taking behavior and traffic accident involvement, thereby enhancing knowledge that can improve traffic safety.

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Social cognition (attitudes and risk perception) research examining the determinants of risky driving behavior demonstrates that there is a strong association between specific risky attitudes and risky driving behavior (Fernandes et al., 2007; Iversen, 2004; Iversen and Rundmo, 2004; Lajunen and Summala, 1995; Tronsmoen, 2010; Ulleberg and Rundmo, 2002). In their research, Iversen (2004) and Tronsmoen (2010) observed that attitudes among young drivers were significantly associated with self-reported risk behavior. Young drivers who report safe traffic attitudes are likely to report less risky driving behavior. These results are consistent with Ulleberg and Rundmo's (2003) observation that attitudes toward risky behavior have a direct effect on risky behavior, although risk perception does not. However, these findings are inconsistent with other studies that suggest that risk perception affects risky behaviors (Harré and Sibley, 2007).

Considerable research has confirmed the influence of different personality traits (sensation seeking, normlessness and aggression) on risky driving behavior among young drivers (Ulleberg and Rundmo, 2003). Sensation seeking is linked to risky driving (Jonah et al., 2001; Ulleberg and Rundmo, 2003), and more specifically, it significantly predicts speeding (Jonah et al., 2001; Fernandes et al., 2010). Additionally, past research illustrates an association between sensation seeking and drunk driving (Fernandes et al., 2007). Other personality traits, such as anxiety, were significantly correlated with excitement-seeking and risky driving behavior (Oltedal and Rundmo, 2006). Moreover, aggressive behavior and driver rage (becoming frustrated and angry in traffic situations) were significantly related to speeding (Begg and Langley, 2004;