

# Stress and anxiety as predictors of road rage



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Road rage or aggressive driving is increasingly getting attention in many major cities in the world including Australia. It has raised serious concern from the authority and the media. Preventive actions are required. Road rage is a form of angry or aggressive driving behaviour by drivers using car or other motor vehicle. The behaviours may include driving in a dangerous and threatening way, tailgating, rude gestures, cutting someone off, flashing headlights, honking, verbal threats and insults. This type of aggressive driving may lead to accident and collision which may results in injuries or deaths.

According to Ayar (2006), road rage can cause three types of harm. Firstly, direct physical harm between the driver and other motorist. Secondly, indirect harm of mental endangerment of other drivers who witness the road rage. Lastly, accidental harm towards the victim and others nearby.

Nowadays, people are spending more time on the road daily, commuting to work, school and home. Several researches have been done to find the interaction between aggressive driving with stress and anxiety. It appears frequently that stress and negative mood occur in driving situations (Galovski & Blanchard, 2004).

Studies have shown that environmental stressors may affect human behaviour. Stress has been seen as a contributing factor to increased aggression (Galovski & Blanchard, 2004). Thus, everyday life stressors such work stress, financial stress, life pressures and personal problems, when coupled with stressful driving experience such as rush hour traffic and congestion together with added effect of time pressure may create a ripe

climate for aggressive driving. The cumulative effect of driving stress along with aggressive driving behaviours can cause dangerous road rage.

In a study conducted by Gulian et al., 1989. E. Gulian, L. M. Debney, A. I. Glendon, D. R. Davies and G. Matthews, Coping with driver stress. In: F. J. McGuigan, W. E. Sime and J. M. Wallace, Editors, Stress and tension control vol. 3, Plenum, New York (1989), pp. 173-186. Gulian et al. (1989) about driver stress, they conceptualized that: First, driver stress can be measured as a response to a specific driving situation. Second, driver stress can be considered to be a result of a more pervasive personality trait found in given individuals. Furthermore, Gulian et al. mentioned that driver stress can be categorized into two levels: situational stress and accumulative stress from negative feelings and frustrations related to the driving experience. Each level intensifies and reinforces one another in a reciprocal manner. Results of this investigation supported previous research indicating that general life situations and the environmental context influence driver stress. These authors found that the interpretation of other drivers' behaviours (including aggressive behaviour) was the number one cause of stress in their driving sample. Most importantly, these investigators also found that 42% to 75% of responses to driver stress involved aggressive driving behaviours.

In addition, Hennessy and Wiesenthal (1999) interviewed drivers during high and low traffic congestion conditions to measure driver stress level and driver behaviours. They found that driver stress and aggression level were greater in high congestion conditions. Drivers interviewed in high-congestion conditions were found to exhibit elevated levels of driver stress, including frustration, irritation, and negative mood. Furthermore, Hennessy and

<https://assignbuster.com/stress-and-anxiety-as-predictors-of-road-rage/>

Wiesenthal (1999) noted that driver stress have been identified with increased aggressive driving, poor concentration levels and increased accident occurrences.

Stress and anxiety is closely related. According to Robinson (1990), anxiety is defined as “ the psychophysiologic signal that the stress response has been initiated”. Anxiety can be seen as a response to an unknown threat, it occurs when an individual anticipates the occurrence of a dangerous or unfortunate event. Besides stress and hostility, anxiety is one of the contributing factors for road rage according to Ayar (2006). Ayar defined road rage as “ a psychological disorder where an individual experiences heightened levels of stress, anxiety, or hostility because of their driving environment.” Increased anxiety can modify one’s perception, thinking, reaction patterns and subsequently deterioration in performance (Brewer, 2000). When this occurs the anxious driver has greater possibility to make an error or respond inappropriately because of a limited focus of attention, misjudgement about what is being observed, stereotyping (e. g. labelling another driver or pedestrian) and impulsive behaviour, as noted by Brewer.

Moreover, there is a link between aggressive driving behaviour with the gender of the motorists. It was reported that males have a higher tendency to be involved in dangerous traffic violations and engage in aggressive driving behaviour or road rage than females (Ayar, 2006). It may be seen as one way to prove ‘ their manhood’ by engaging in the risk taking behaviour. Males are commonly found to have higher levels of personality traits that are related to risk taking, deviant behaviour, and hostility on all driving outcomes compared to females (Patil, Shope, Raghunathan & Bingham, <https://assignbuster.com/stress-and-anxiety-as-predictors-of-road-rage/>

2006). Several investigations showed that male drivers are more reckless, impatient, inconsiderate, react more aggressively in congestion, more prone to engage in revengeful and physically aggressive thinking, as well as exhibit higher trait driving anger than female drivers, as noted by Sharkin (2004).

In summary, contemporary studies have indicated that driver's level of stress and anxiety are contributing factors to the aggressive driving behaviour or road rage. This present study aims to investigate the correlation between level of stress and anxiety (measured using DASS) with level of road rage. Secondly, is to see the gender associated level of road rage.

In accord with previous research, it is hypothesised that

There is a positive correlation between level of stress with road rage

There is a positive correlation between level of anxiety with road rage

The male mean score for road rage is higher than female mean score for road rage.

## Method

### Participants

The sample for this research consisted of 100 participants, over the age of 18 years, who were enrolled in the Psychology PSY247 unit at Charles Darwin University. This subsample was randomly selected from the larger population of Charles Darwin University and did not differ from the larger sample. There were no exclusion criteria. The sample consisted of 22 males, (age:  $M = 36$ .

<https://assignbuster.com/stress-and-anxiety-as-predictors-of-road-rage/>

68, SD= 10. 66) and 78 females (age: M= 34. 51, SD= 10. 438). None of the participants chose not to identify their gender or their age. All participants were unpaid volunteers. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and were able to withdraw at any time. There were no inducements offered.

## Materials

The current study utilised a single multi-faceted questionnaire to obtain relevant data on demographic information and the Anxiety and Stress score from the DASS (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale), depression is not measured in this study. The questionnaire was loaded onto Survey Monkey which is an online surveying program and took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The fully compiled questionnaire is outlined in Appendix A.

## Anxiety and Stress

Participants were asked to respond to a number of questions which base on the Anxiety and Stress subscales from DASS (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale) using a 4-point Likert scale (0 - 3) with the response options of ' 0 = did not apply to me at all', ' 1 = applied to me to some degree, or some of the time', ' 2 = applied to me to a considerable degree or a good part of time', and ' 3 = applied to me very much, or most of the time'. The questionnaire was consisted of 14 statements which were divided into 7 statements to assess stress (e. g. ' I found it hard to wind down'), and 7 statements to assess anxiety (e. g. ' I was aware of dryness of my mouth'). Responses to all relevant statements were then summed up. Scores ranged from 7 to 26.

## Procedure

A link to the questionnaire on Survey Monkey was made available to all students enrolled in PSY247 via the Learnline website. The plain language statement clearly identified the researchers involved in the study, the aims of the studies and the age requirement necessary to participate. The plain language statement also indicated that participation in the research is voluntary, that the information provided is completely confidential and an estimation of how long should take to complete. It also provided contact details for the researchers if any issues arise, methods for accessing results from the investigation and the fact that by completing the questionnaire and submitting it to the online site, it is assumed that the individual has consented to participate.

Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire with two weeks of the link becoming available.