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# Risky Driving in Regional Victoria 2012: Report of Wave 1 Qualitative Research

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## Contents

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<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1. Background .....	1
1.2. Aim and objectives.....	1
1.3. Report structure .....	2
<b>2. Methodology</b> .....	<b>3</b>
2.1. Focus groups .....	3
2.2. Analysis and reporting .....	4
2.3. Respondent profile.....	4
<b>3. General views on driving in regional Victoria</b> .....	<b>8</b>
3.1. Top of mind issues.....	8
3.2. Regional vs. non-regional driving.....	8
3.3. Familiarity with the roads .....	9
3.4. Main causes of accidents – external and internal .....	9
3.5. Local police enforcement and effectiveness .....	12
3.6. Responsibilities keeping the road safe .....	15
<b>4. Defining risky driving</b> .....	<b>18</b>
4.1. Risky driving and dangerous driving .....	18
4.2. Risk-taking behaviour .....	21
4.3. Environmental/external factors .....	27
<b>5. Typologies of risky driving behaviour</b> .....	<b>32</b>
5.1. “Unavoidable” (reactive) risk taking .....	33
5.2. “Thoughtless” (unintentional) risk taking .....	34
5.3. “Measured” (calculated) risk taking.....	37
5.4. “Hedonistic” and normalised risk taking .....	42
<b>6. Perceptions of risk and consequence</b> .....	<b>45</b>
6.1. Risks and Consequences .....	45
6.2. Personal responsibility .....	48
6.3. Acceptance of risk in driving .....	50
6.4. Moderating risky behaviour.....	51
6.5. Individual responses to moderating behaviour .....	56
6.6. Perceived need to moderate behaviour .....	57
<b>7. Reducing risk taking behaviour - what do risky drivers suggest?</b> .....	<b>58</b>
7.1. Greater enforcement.....	58
7.2. Education and training .....	60
7.3. Rewarding ‘good’ driving .....	61
<b>8. Awareness of the Talk the Toll Down campaign</b> .....	<b>62</b>
8.1. Familiarity .....	62
8.2. Communication methods .....	62
8.3. Road safety as a topic of conversation .....	64
<b>9. Conclusions</b> .....	<b>65</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Discussion Guide</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Self-Completion Questionnaire</b> .....	<b>75</b>

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## List of figures

Figure 2.1	Respondents by region.....	5
Figure 2.2	Driving licence status.....	5
Figure 2.3	Licence type .....	6
Figure 2.4	Previous licence suspension .....	6
Figure 2.5	Respondent employment status .....	7
Figure 4.1	Defining risky driving.....	20
Figure 4.2	Speeding .....	22
Figure 4.3	Views on speed limit enforcement .....	22
Figure 4.4	Driving over the legal BAC in the previous 6 months.....	24
Figure 5.1	Typologies of risky driving behaviour.....	32
Figure 5.2	Unplanned risks – planning transport home after drinking.....	36
Figure 5.3	Self-assessment of driving skills .....	41
Figure 6.1	Worries about drink-driving.....	46
Figure 6.2	Speed enforcement and the toll.....	48
Figure 6.3	Attitudes to others' risk taking behaviours .....	49
Figure 6.4	Being a passenger with a driver over the BAC limit.....	50
Figure 6.5	Association with speeding and increased chance of crashing .....	50
Figure 6.6	Perceived chance of being caught speeding .....	51
Figure 6.7	Influences on driving speed .....	56
Figure 7.1	The deterrent effect of penalties for speeding .....	59
Figure 7.2	Chances of being caught drink/driving.....	60
Figure 7.3	Drink driving penalties .....	60

## List of tables

Table 6.1	Risk – rationalising behaviour and minimising consequences .....	47
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## Executive summary

The Transport Accident Commission (The TAC) commissioned the Social Research Centre to conduct a program of qualitative research into road safety in regional Victoria. Specifically the research was designed to provide an understanding of attitudes to and perceptions of road safety by young drivers in selected rural locations in the shires of Cardinia, Mitchell, and Ballarat/Golden Plains.

### Research aim and objectives

The overall aim of the first stage of the current project was to conduct focus groups in three regional locations to explore key road safety issues such as speeding and drink and drug driving with residents from these areas, in order to gain an understanding of the driving behaviours of the participants and those who reside in the local area generally. Additionally, this project aimed to assess awareness and effectiveness of the “Talk the Toll Down” campaign and explore opportunities to improve future campaign activities.

### Research Approach

Twelve focus group discussions were conducted in three towns: Gembrook (Cardinia Shire), Broadford (Mitchell Shire) and Buninyong (Ballarat/Golden Plains Shire). The groups were segmented according to sex and age (18-24 year olds and 25-35 year olds); a total of 92 participants took part in this research. Participants were recruited to the study using recruitment criteria that identified them as potentially ‘risky’ drivers (for example, previous history of drink-driving, loss of licence and so forth).

Participants were recruited via a combination of the VicRoads database of registered drivers in each of these three regions, research recruitment databases and snowballing techniques. The groups were facilitated by an experienced moderator, using a discussion guide developed in consultation with The TAC project team. The research took place during August and September 2012.

### General views on driving in regional Victoria

Participants identified several negative aspects of regional driving, specifically the presence of wildlife and poorly maintained roads, as being factors unique to regional, non-metropolitan areas. However participants also identified a number of positive features of non-metropolitan driving which included considerably less congestion on the roads, less pedestrians, and fewer traffic lights.

Being familiar with the layout and conditions of the roads and surrounds was an important factor for many participants across all three regions when discussing driving and road safety. Indeed, this sense of familiarity made many participants feel that their sometimes

risky behaviour was ultimately safe because they knew the roads well enough to take some risks and feel confident doing so.

Participants identified the main causes of accidents in their local areas as: general poor driving, often caused by inexperience; hooning and recklessness on the roads; not paying proper attention and becoming distracted while driving; and according to some, driving too slowly also had the potential to cause accidents on the roads.

Participants commonly perceived the police's attempts at road safety enforcement to be token or misplaced. Males in particular regarded speeding penalties as revenue-raising or roadside stops as biased or unnecessary, rather than having safety as their ultimate aim.

Suggestions for making the roads safer included better education and driving instruction, making it more difficult to obtain and retain one's license, having the road conditions improved, and having more responsible drivers on the roads in general.

### **Defining risky driving**

In general, participants distinguished between risky driving and dangerous driving: risk was perceived by many as relating more to activities that carried a 'risk' of getting caught, whilst danger was regarded as potentially causing harm to one-self or others. Speeding was often cited as an example of risky driving, whereas dangerous driving examples were more commonly related to other activities such as doing burn-outs or drink-driving as well as activities that it was perceived would put others at risk of harm.

The most commonly mentioned behaviours which participants considered risky were speeding, using a mobile phone whilst driving, drink driving, and 'hooning'/general reckless behaviour.

### **Typologies of risky driving**

The research identified four different typologies of risky driving behaviour, influenced by a range of attitudinal, behavioural and external factors. These were:

- unavoidable/reactive risks;
  - risks are taken when there is perceived to be no other choice or option.
- thoughtless/unintentional risks;
  - risks are unintentional, unconscious or due to lack of concentration.
- measured/calculated risks;
  - risks are calculated and perceived to have low consequences; and,
- continuous risks
  - risk-taking is hedonistic, normalised and an enjoyable component of driving.

In the most part, examples of all of these risk taking behaviours were evident within and across the groups. Many participants justified engaging in these risky driving behaviours

on the grounds that they possessed an above average driving ability which mitigated against any risk taking.

### **Perceptions of risk and consequence**

Participants reported seldom considering the consequences of their risky driving other than the likelihood of getting caught. In fact, participants often used muddled and contradictory rationalisations of the risks they took (or used to take) to minimise the potential consequences of those risks. They were often quick to judge what they perceived as risky driving behaviour of others, but were able to rationalise their own driving behaviour so that it seemed more acceptable (both to them and to others).

For most participants, a sense of personal responsibility for risky driving was relatively low. The presence of passengers in the car did, however, affect their sense of responsibility and consequently temper their risk taking. To many participants, driving alone appeared to provide an authority to take risks, with an assumption that one was only putting oneself at risk (and hence only had oneself to blame if something went wrong).

Participants identified a range of factors or circumstances which had resulted in them modifying their risky driving behaviour. The main factors which had moderated (or have the potential to moderate) risky driving behaviour included changes in life stage or circumstances, driving alone or with others, previous accidents and the accumulation of points, loss of licence and fines.

### **Reducing risk taking behaviour: what do risky drivers suggest?**

Participants made suggestions for reducing risk taking behaviour; the disconnect between risk-taking behaviour and personal responsibility meant that these strategies were invariably directed at others. The strategies proposed were greater enforcement, education and training, and rewarding 'good' driving.

### **Awareness of the Talk the Toll Down campaign**

Across all groups, no participants claimed to be familiar with the Talk the Toll Down campaign. Neither the concept, name, logo nor content were recalled; some mentioned familiarity with other TAC-related campaigns instead, such as the Touched By The Road Toll bumper stickers, and TAC billboards and television commercials.

Most participants explained that they would probably not read an article about road safety or the road toll, and would more likely skim past it. However, if there was an article about a local fatality, serious accident, or police blitz they would perhaps be more likely to take notice. Road safety was not a frequent topic of conversation for amongst participants, their families and friends.

## Conclusions

Participants' preparedness to engage in risky driving behaviour was influenced by a range of factors, including age, gender, life stage, education, misinformation, low levels of personal responsibility, driving skills and a lack of serious consideration or acknowledgement of the potential negative impacts of risky driving (over and above financial penalties and loss of licence).

In discussing strategies to address risky driving, the following issues were identified:

- **Failure to recognise the role of penalties in deterring risky driving.** Participants never acknowledged that the purpose of penalties (particularly for speeding) was to encourage people to drive at a safe speed, in order to minimise the risk of harm to themselves or others. Indeed, they tended to regard penalties as an annoyance or an inconvenience rather than a safety issue.
- **Responsibility for self.** Participants took more risks when driving alone, assuming that if something happened it would be the fault of the other road user, hence the only person affected would be themselves.
- **Perceived lack of choice in taking some risks.** Participants often felt they lacked any choice around engaging in certain risky driving behaviours (for example, using their mobile phones as there was nowhere to pull over).
- **Hazard perception.** Participants tended to place blame on hazards (animals, weather, other drivers, poor lighting etc) rather than adjust driving behaviour in potentially hazardous situations.
- **Aggressive driving.** Frustration with other drivers contributed to risky behaviours such as tailgating. Such behaviour was commonly perceived as excusable or understandable.
- **Driving skills.** The overwhelming majority of participants judged their driving skills to be better than the average. This perception, along with a relatively low level of personal responsibility (when driving alone) is a potentially risky combination.
- **Normalising risky driving.** Many participants regarded receiving points, fines and in some cases, loss of licence as fairly typical or normal. Indeed, there was little stigma attached to receiving points or fines.
- **Understanding different risk-taking typologies.** This research has identified different risk-taking 'rationales' which can be explored during subsequent stages of this longitudinal project.
- **Early driving experiences.** Many drivers acknowledged that their driving had improved since they first started driving. There was an appreciation that they had been relatively inexperienced when they began driving.

## 1. Introduction

The Transport Accident Commission commissioned the Social Research Centre to conduct a program of qualitative research into road safety in regional Victoria. Specifically the research was designed to provide an understanding of attitudes to and perceptions of road safety by drivers in selected rural locations in the shires of Cardinia, Mitchell, and Ballarat/Golden Plains.

This report focuses on the findings from the first stage of a longitudinal project that will also involve participant engagement through online bulletin board discussions and a second round of follow up focus groups in 2013.

### 1.1. Background

Since 2008 the TAC has conducted focus groups in various locations across regional Victoria, with the aim of exploring attitudes and perspectives in relation to road safety held by residents of regional or rural locations. These focus groups have been conducted in Mildura, Shepparton, Ballarat, Geelong, Bendigo, Traralgon, Warrnambool, Warragul, Leongatha, Cockatoo, Mornington, Euroa, Drouin and Castlemaine. Insights gained from the research have been used to inform marketing and road safety strategies. Results have also been communicated with Victoria Police to assist their own strategy development and enforcement practices.

### 1.2. Aim and objectives

The overall aim of the first stage of the current project was to conduct focus groups in three regional locations to explore key road safety issues such as speeding and drink and drug driving with residents from these areas, in order to gain an understanding of the driving behaviours of the participants and those who reside in the local area generally. Additionally, this project aimed to assess awareness and effectiveness of the “Talk the Toll Down” campaign and explore opportunities to improve future campaign activities.

Specific objectives that were pursued in the research included:

- understanding the driving behaviour of participants and others in the local area generally
- exploring key areas of road safety and risk-taking such as speeding, drink and drug driving, driving whilst tired, driving whilst distracted
- understanding in more detail why drivers may take risks – moving on from the observational to the analytical
- gaining a greater insight into perceptions of risk and consequences and how and why these vary within and between groups
- exploring and identifying acceptability and norms relating to risks among young drivers
- exploration of the notion of personal responsibility and how these influence attitudes and behaviour
- gaining insights that can be used to inform marketing and road safety strategies.



### **1.3. Report structure**

The findings of this research are presented using the following structure:

- Methodology (Section 2)
- General views on driving in regional Victoria (Section 3)
- Defining risky driving (Section 4)
- Typologies of risk-taking behaviour (Section 5)
- Perceptions of risk and consequence (Section 6)
- Reducing risky behaviour – what do risky drivers suggest? (Section 7)
- Talk The Toll Down – awareness and views (Section 8)
- Conclusions (Section 9)

## 2. Methodology

The research primarily used a qualitative method, comprising twelve focus group discussions, including four in each of the three locations. The groups were conducted at local facilities in each of the regions between the 27 August and 12 September 2012. The quantitative component of the research comprised the administering of a self-completion questionnaire to each participant at the end of the focus groups.

### 2.1. Focus groups

#### 2.1.1. Sample & segmentation

In each of the three locations, the groups were segmented according to sex and age, as follows:

- 18-24 year olds
- 25-35 year olds.

Participants were selected from a combination of the VicRoads data base of registered drivers in each of these three regions, research recruitment databases and snowballing techniques.

Selection of participants involved a screening questionnaire, with selection based on questions measuring risk-taking behaviour on the roads, and in general.

The original RFQ suggested that up to 10 participants would be recruited to each group, however, this was reduced to 9 with the expectation of some no-shows and aiming for a total of 6-8 participants per group. In the end, groups ranged in size from 4 to 9 participants, with a total of 92 participants across the 12 groups.

#### 2.1.2. Recruitment

Recruitment involved telephone contact, a screening questionnaire to assess eligibility and determining suitability for participants to attend the scheduled groups.

Recruitment was conducted by a professional recruitment agency, using a screening questionnaire based on the above criteria. Participants were given an incentive according to current market rates (\$75).

#### 2.1.3. Groups and facilities

Each focus group was conducted by an experienced moderator. With the permission of participants, research sessions were recorded with an audio voice recorder, and these recordings were transcribed for the purposes of analysis.

Groups were conducted at convenient local facilities, including community centres and town hall rooms.

#### **2.1.4. Group discussions**

A discussion guide was developed in consultation with the TAC project team, based on the objectives listed above, after a detailed briefing on the background and purpose of the study. Please see Appendix 1 for the discussion guide.

#### **2.1.5. Self-completion questionnaires**

The self-completion questionnaire administered to participants was put together by the Social Research Centre in conjunction with the TAC and included a range of questions lifted from the TAC Road Safety Monitor survey.

See Appendix 2 for the self-completion questionnaire.

### **2.2. Analysis and reporting**

All discussions were digitally recorded (with consent) and the recordings were used for analysis purposes. The analysis was conducted using an analysis framework for the classification and interpretation of qualitative data. The key themes and topics were identified through the discussion guide and through an initial review of the qualitative data to develop an analysis coding structure. Sections of the recordings were then coded (using NVivo software for the management of qualitative data) to enable a thematic retrieval of data under each theme, or by group attributes (to allow, for example, comparison of responses to themes or questions by gender or age group). Direct quotations have also been referenced in the analysis to allow inclusion in the reporting. The use of this thematic data coding technique ensures that findings are directly traceable back to the raw data, thus providing a fully transparent analytical method.

Verbatim quotations from across the research have been included in this report to illustrate these findings. Where words are shown in square brackets [as such] this denotes the author's additional words, included to make a sentence clearer.

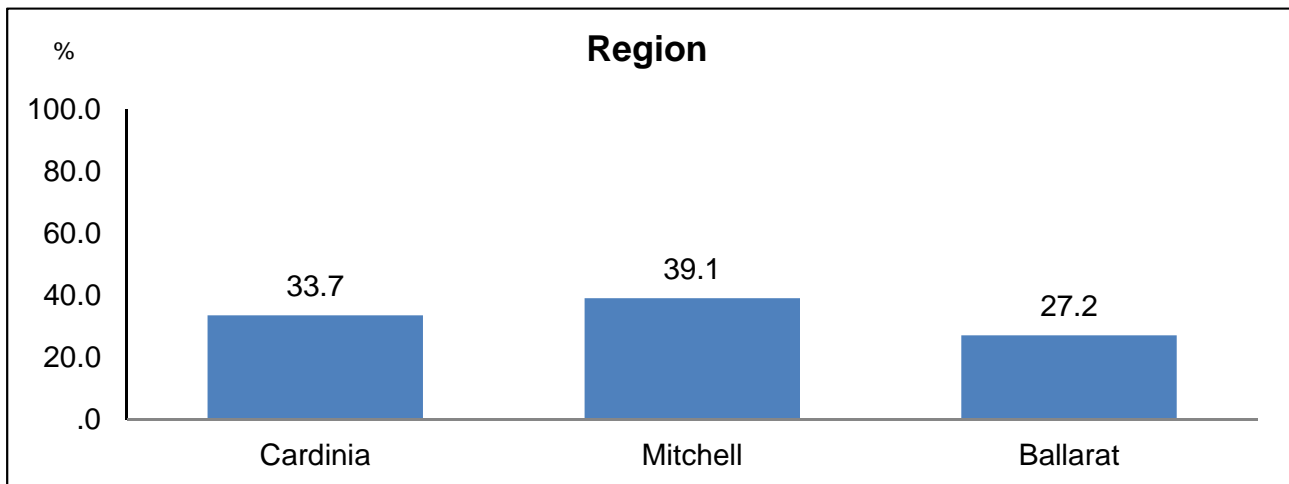
Data from the self-completion questionnaires was analysed using SPSS.

### **2.3. Respondent profile**

Focus group attendees comprised a balanced split across gender and age: 44 males, 48 females; 43 19-24 year olds, 49 25-35 year olds.

The participant count across the three locations was somewhat equal, however due to last minute cancellations and no-shows (primarily due to weather), there were slightly fewer participants in the Ballarat groups, as can be seen in the table below.

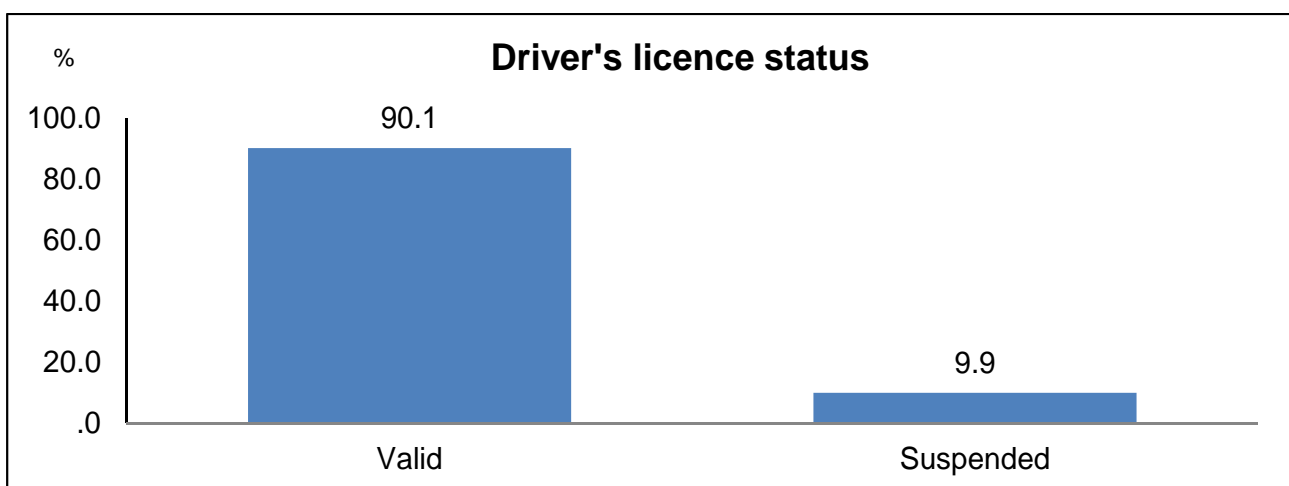
**Figure 2.1 Respondents by region**



*n* = 92

Almost 10% of participants across all groups had a suspended driver's licence during the fieldwork period.

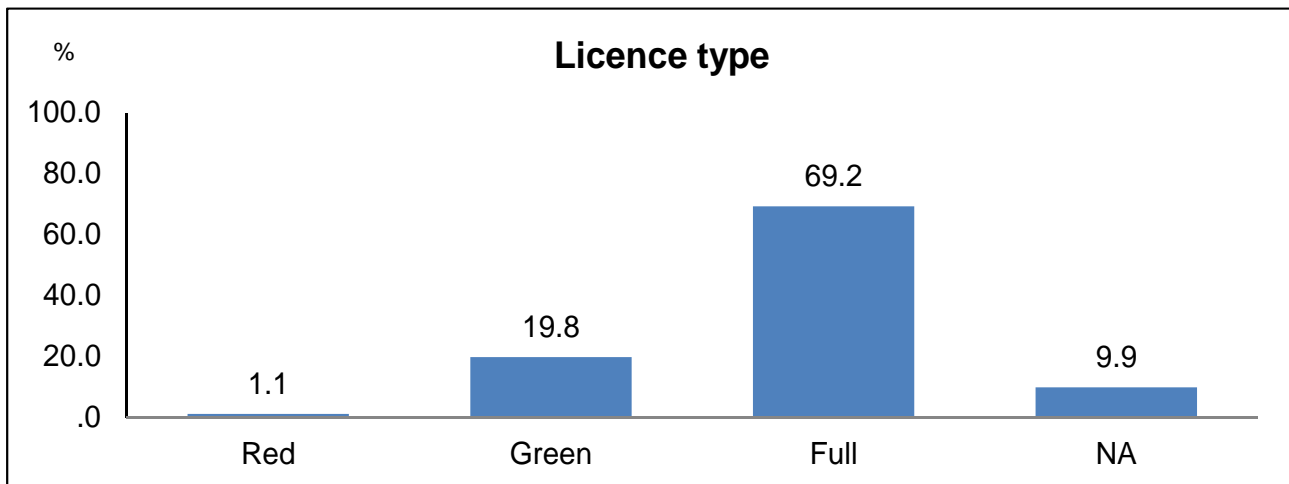
**Figure 2.2 Driving licence status**



*n* = 92

As can be seen here, 70% of participants had a full licence, and about 21% had either green or red P-plates.

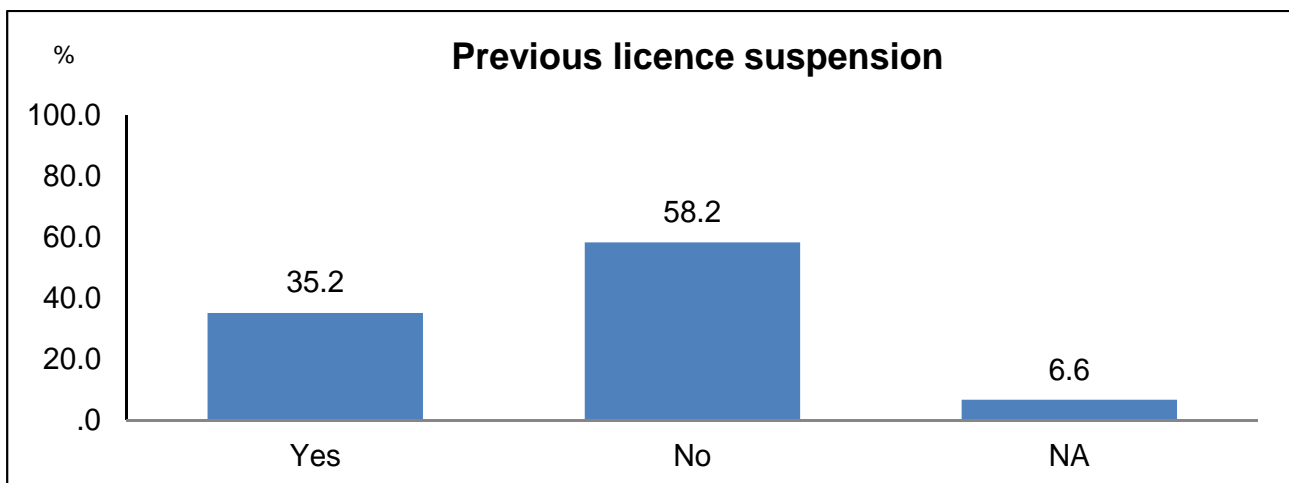
**Figure 2.3 Licence type**



*n* = 92

Across all groups, approximately 35% of participants reported that they had had their licence suspended prior to the fieldwork period.

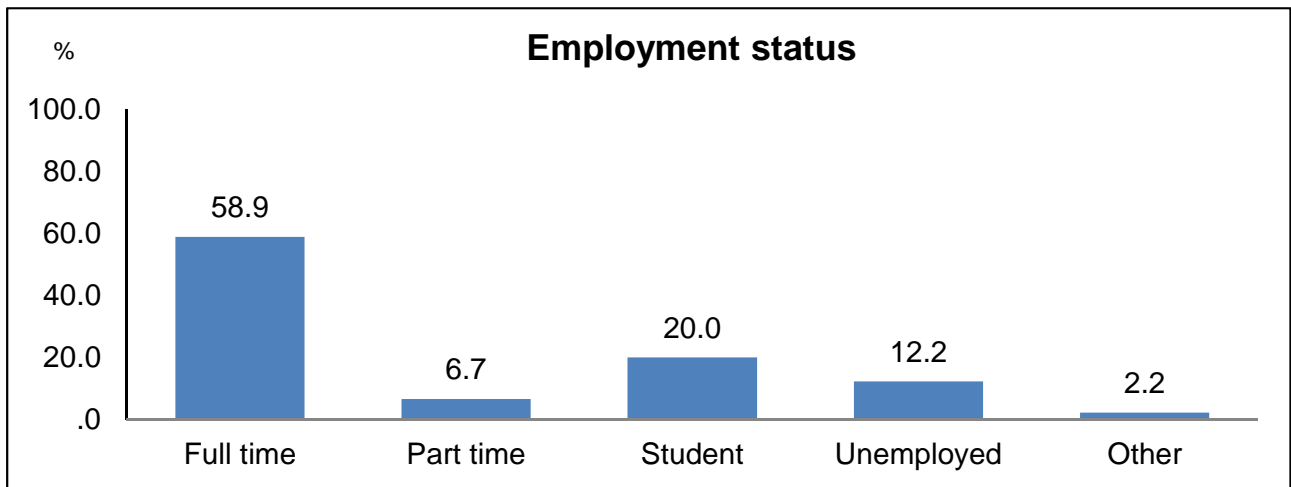
**Figure 2.4 Previous licence suspension**



*n* = 92

As can be seen below, almost 60% of participants were employed full time, and about 20% recorded their main activity as studying.

**Figure 2.5 Respondent employment status**



*n* = 92

### 3. General views on driving in regional Victoria

This section of the report addresses a number of topics covered in the introductory section of the group discussions. This includes respondents' top-of-mind opinions on what characterises driving in their areas; how these characteristics compare to metropolitan areas; the main causes of road accidents; police presence and enforcement on the roads; and, issues to do with whose responsibility it was to keep the roads safe.

This section should be seen as a brief 'scene-setting' overview of issues that are explored in greater depth in later sections of the report.

#### 3.1. Top of mind issues

At the beginning of each group, participants were asked to discuss, in general terms, what it was like driving in their local areas, and what issues came to mind when thinking about road safety.

Overwhelmingly, across all three regions, the most frequently mentioned topics were the poor conditions of the roads (e.g. terrain, surface upkeep), wildlife, and the behaviours of other drivers. In regards to the latter, participants commented on the driving behaviour of non-locals, women (by males), older people, P-platers, and motorcyclists and truck drivers (by females). The effects of weather were also mentioned as having influenced driving experience.

Each of these issues is covered in greater detail with reference to how they affect driving and road safety in Section 4.3 of this report.

#### 3.2. Regional vs. non-regional driving

The issues discussed in 3.1 above, namely the presence of wildlife and poorly maintained roads were reported as being factors unique to regional, non-metropolitan areas. Whilst these negative aspects of regional driving are discussed in section 4.3.4 below, there were a number of positive features of non-metropolitan driving that were brought up by participants that should be mentioned here. These include considerably less congestion on the roads, fewer pedestrians to avoid, and fewer traffic lights. All these differences were appreciated by locals.

*And you know that it's very, very rarely pedestrians, you know that there are no schools on the way down. And you have wombats everywhere. They are sleeping at the side of the road, but yeah, that's the other thing as well you know that the risks that you take when you do drive as well, are yours. Not necessarily putting other people at risk the way that you would if you were driving in a town or a suburban area. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

*We don't have as many stupid pedestrians in the bush so we're a bit lucky there (Group 2 older males Broadford)*

*There's less traffic. Well compared to city Melbourne. (Group 12 older females Buninyong)*

*I find them [roundabouts] better than stop signs and traffic lights. (Group 12 older females Buninyong)*

*Less congestion. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

*A lot better than the city*

*- Yeah definitely compared to driving around the city (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

### **3.3. Familiarity with the roads**

Being familiar with the layout and conditions of the roads and surrounds was an important factor for many participants across all three regions when discussing driving and road safety. That is, having a sense of familiarity made many participants feel that their sometimes risky behaviour was ultimately safe because they knew the roads well enough to take some risks and feel confident doing so. However, this familiarity and confidence on the roads could at times lead to an overconfidence that made some participants careless whilst driving.

*I feel, I think it's 'cause I know Ballarat so well, I've been here my whole life so I know the roads like the back of my hand. (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

*It depends on the area. If you know the area, right, it's [20km/h over the limit] not risky, but if you're new to the area I would say it's very risky. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*I think it's only passengers in the car that seem to be nervous when you're driving, but you could do it with your eyes closed when you think about how many times a day you are going down to Pakenham or down to Emerald and from here, you do just get used to the roads. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

*I think you get to the stage where you're just that relaxed and then all of a sudden there's a tree across the road that you don't see and it makes you think 'ooh right, I need to go back to being, not like you said before about being 'cocky' but that it is relaxing up until a point isn't it and then it's scary again. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

### **3.4. Main causes of accidents – external and internal**

Participants were asked to discuss what they thought the main causes of accidents were in their local areas. The main issues mentioned across all groups included general poor driving, often caused by inexperience; hooning and recklessness on the roads; not paying proper attention and becoming distracted while driving; and according to some, driving too slowly also had the potential to cause accidents on the roads.



The more broadly discussed issues of speeding, drink driving, and external conditions such as wildlife and poor road conditions were reported to be likely causes of accidents but are not discussed in this section, as they are covered at length in other sections of the report.

It should be noted that across all groups, participants' understanding of who and what causes accidents (or near accidents) on the roads was externalised from themselves; that is, it was generally felt that the actions of other drivers, or environmental conditions beyond their control created most danger on the roads, rather than their own personal behaviour.

### **Inexperience/Poor driving**

A number of participants explained that many accidents were caused by drivers who were inexperienced or unskilled behind the wheel. This could be due to a number of factors mentioned above, such as unfamiliarity with the roads, a poor understanding of the road rules, or general unskilled driving, e.g. by women, P-platers, or older people.

*Inexperienced drivers in the area like the roads are hard to drive, if you've driven through Monbulk, Olinda and everything there's small windy roads and if you're not confident on them the trucks, 'cause the nurseries and stuff, trucks going everywhere, there's not a lot of road and a lot of people hit trees on the side of the road and gutters and everything 'cause they just can't find any room (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*That's what I would say; the most are uneducated at driving, whether it comes from swerving from a kangaroo or a pothole or overtaking someone and not knowing how to judge the distance. (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

### **Distracted/Not paying attention**

Participants commonly asserted that most accidents and near misses they had experienced were caused when they had become distracted behind the wheel. Unlike poor driving or inexperience, this was something that many participants admitted to having done themselves when driving, and as such was understood to be a very common cause of mishaps on the road.

*Like you said before or someone said before, you look up and the car in front of you has stopped at the roundabout, if you're going along and you change your radio station or do anything and just for one second you look back up and there's a dickhead stopped in front of you, bang. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*Yeah some of the others were just stupid things like leaning down to get my smokes and seeing a green arrow and just put my foot down and went straight into the car stopped in front of me. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

*And even when you've got a kid in the car, like children, and maybe they're making a trouble at the time will cause me to do something... Because they want attention - they say "hey, hey", and bang! (Group 12 older females Buninyong)*

### **Hooning/Intentional recklessness**

It was reported in all 3 regions that hoon behaviour was common on the roads. Generally, this was seen as behaviour performed by others, however numerous males across all regions admitted to hooning themselves. Interestingly, males that admitted to engaging in intentional reckless driving were still judgmental of others when they witnessed hooning in their local area. These issues are discussed in more detail in section 5.

*I live a bit out of town, and there's always like burn outs up my road and stuff, people just doing stupid things in the wet and people whose cars end up in the spoon drains on my road just left there. (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

*The other day I was on the Hume, just where Donnybrook is and there was a couple of young guys dragging, you know but the way I was doing it was just in and out of traffic and shit, so that part well, "Look at you dickheads." That's an accident waiting to happen. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*There's plenty of idiots around here. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*There's a lot of hoon drivers - P platers and stuff, in their fully epic Commodores. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

### **Driving too slowly**

In a few groups, it was mentioned that slow drivers can create dangerous situations, particularly when other drivers need to overtake them, often on narrow and winding roads. Again, it should be noted that much of the discussion around this issue involved participants externalising the causes of risky driving behaviour, whereby it was the fault of others driving slowly that caused this reactionary risky driving behaviour.

*I think sometimes it's just as dangerous to go heaps under the speed limit as well though 'cause then it causes people to do silly things like overtake or get angry or tailgate or overtake in shit spots and that. So I think that's just as much of a risk to drive under the speed limit. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*Sometimes going too slow. People that go too slow on these country roads and then people try to overtake them. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*People driving down the main road at forty k's an hour. (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

### 3.5. Local police enforcement and effectiveness

Participants were prompted to discuss their views on the local police in their area, including their presence, enforcement and effectiveness on the roads.

It was common across groups for people to express that the police's attempts at road safety enforcement were often token or misplaced. Males were noticeably more critical of police law enforcement on the roads; many saw speeding penalties as revenue-raising or roadside stops as biased or unnecessary, rather than having safety as their ultimate aim.

*Yeah, yeah, like that's right, I think just on the enforcement of ... speeding per say, the way they go about it, they definitely are over-zealous (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*I get pulled over quite regularly, just because they think my car is modded or something so twenty minutes here and there, especially when I'm running late somewhere, just it's a pain in the arse, I agree that they pick on – I find they pick on me. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*Years ago, my old man used to play football in Bendigo and when they finished playing footy and they go to the clubrooms and the coppers would go in and get all the keys off. And if they caught them they'd take them home by the ear and take them to their mum. You'd get your arse kicked by your parents. Now it's all revenue. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

Similarly, in a few groups (males and females) the idea that speed cameras were ineffective at motivating people to drive slower in general was shared. Again, these were seen as revenue-raising features that were either easily avoided (due to knowing where they were) or positioned at points on the road where it was easy to unknowingly go above the speed limit briefly.

*Speed cameras on the side of the road.*

*- Too many.*

*- It's all revenue. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*I find that I just know where I can speed and you know where to slow down 'cause there's likely to be a camera there. So that is terrible too but you know where you're gonna get caught so you don't speed there. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

This idea that speed cameras did little to change the way people drove in general featured in most groups. Many participants explained that knowing where the fixed cameras were slowed their driving down momentarily, but did not motivate them to moderate their speeding at other times. Similarly, some participants explained that they knew what their local police cars looked like, and thus slowed down when they saw them.

*I sussed out all the Ballarat cars I know every single one. (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

*It's about giving them a fine or if they know that they're there then they're going to slow down. They'll slow just for that bit then they'll keep going. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

Avoiding the police in general was something that numerous participants spoke about; across all three regions it was common for males and females (females to a lesser extent, as they reportedly engaged in illegal or risky driving less frequently than males) to minimise their risk of being apprehended by the police by either taking back roads, driving particular types of cars, or driving at particular times of the day/night.

*You know on the back road that they are pretty much not going to be there. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

*If you've been a local long enough, you actually know when they're going to be there on what day and where. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

*You sort of get to know where all the booze buses are and stuff most of the time, like on Sturt, on the main road. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*When you've had a few beers...*

*- Go the back way home. (Group 7 younger males Broadford)*

Further, it was felt by many that police target particular types of drivers on the roads, specifically P-platers, or those in fast or powerful cars.

*They just pick on P-platers. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*Used to be pulled over three times a week when I was on P-plates. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

*I think it depends on what car someone drives. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*Yeah, there's a few that have got names for themselves... for just being ridiculously over the top.*

*- Using power for what they feel. (Group 11, young males Buninyong)*

*That's why I bought my little corolla because there's less potential attention from the police – a lot less. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

In two of the male groups it was expressed that there seemed to be a double standard for how civilians were expected to behave on the road in comparison to how police drove; i.e. a few male participants explained that they had seen police driving

illegally and recklessly at unnecessary times. This sense of a double standard on the roads caused a feeling of indignation for some.

*And you see it's like there's a law for them and a law for us and it's like – well hold up, it's just as dangerous and you guys are allowed to speed when you've got your lights on but if you're on your mobile phone as well, you've increased your risk for yourselves and other people. (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*It's not fair as well. If a copper gets pulled over by another copper, say an off-duty copper... and go, "Oh, no, mate, I'm a copper."*

*The amount of cop cars I've seen go through Stop signs and that. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*Yeah, if they can do what they want, why can't we? (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

Amongst females it was commonly expressed that there was a minimal and ineffective police presence on the roads which did not appear to target the genuine perpetrators and causes of dangerous driving.

*No, I'm not a local. Like, I've been here a couple of years. But that's what I mean, like, I should be booked. When they pull me over, I'm just, like, "Oh, here we go." And I don't get booked. And I don't understand because if I'm doing the wrong thing I should be punished for it. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*But even cops these days have no idea like what they're doing, I've seen people who will speed off and do stupid things and the cops' just driving and they don't even acknowledge it anymore (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

*And they drive up and down the main street, they're not going to go up and down the back roads where there is speeding (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

*There's police? (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

Conversely, some participants mentioned that there was a considerable police presence on their local roads; however this tended to be in the larger regional towns, such as Seymour and Wallan.

*In Seymour there's always a lot of breathos... since moving down here at the beginning of the year I've been stopped by about five or six times, and I've never been stopped in Queensland. Yeah, they've always got roadblocks and breathos.*

*They never do it Broadford, maybe once a year (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*I find in Wallan that they're real pricks. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

### 3.6. Responsibilities keeping the road safe

Participants in all groups were asked whose responsibility it was to keep the roads safe. This question was interpreted in different ways, resulting in a range of responses, from drivers themselves to VicRoads and the council. When thinking about what could be done to make the roads safer, participants commonly mentioned better education and driving instruction, making it more difficult to obtain and retain one's license, having the road conditions improved, and having more responsible drivers on the roads in general.

#### Council and VicRoads

It was common in both male and female groups from all regions for participants to exclaim that it is the responsibility of VicRoads and/or the local councils to better maintain the condition of the roads and thus improve safety for drivers. It was often this conceptualisation of road safety responsibility that was mentioned first across all groups.

*Moderator: Whose responsibility is it to keep roads safe?*

*- It's councils.*

*- VicRoads, isn't it? (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*The people that make the roads – I mean to be honest if there wasn't potholes a metre wide you wouldn't then have to go onto the wrong side of the road to go around that pothole. Same thing if the roads were that little bit wider trucks wouldn't have to cut corners to make it around without putting their wheels off the road. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

#### Driver education

A few participants explained that driver education ought to begin at an earlier age in schools, to prepare future L-platers for the driving experience. Similarly, some mentioned that young children needed to be shown the consequences of dangerous driving directly, for example, by seeing injuries sustained by accident victims.

*Education at school. Like maybe scaring them with showing young people in accidents and stuff like that. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*I think that would be, they should do some education in schools like when I got my 'L's and that, the only education I got was the book VicRoads sent out to you whereas if you had like a say a class in high school that just once a fortnight was on drivers education like standard road rules. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

Conducting compulsory defensive driving courses was a suggestion made by a few participants as a way of better preparing young drivers.

*I think everyone should be made to do a defensive driving course once they get their license so they know how to get themselves out of a skid, things like that. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

Some female participants explained that it was difficult to keep up with the changing road rules, and that they were unlikely to find out if a particular law or penalty had changed. They suggested there be a way to be informed about these changes.

*I think there should actually be refresher driving courses definitely... when they send you the reminder for you when your rego's due. Another little slip saying these are the road rules (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

### **Obtaining and retaining a licence**

Many participants explained that obtaining a license was too easy, and that the process of getting a license did not suitably test the necessary skills of a driver, nor adequately prepare young people for driving on the roads.

*I was going to say if you want to make the roads safer, make it harder to get your license. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

*There is not enough...like, VicRoads don't teach them enough. When you go for your licence, it's just wham, bam, thank you ma'am – here's your licence. Go and kill yourself, go wrap yourself around a tree. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*I know with me, with my license I pretty much drove up a road, did a 3-point turn around, cut the [inaudible] that was it, I had my license. I think there should be more in the way that you get your license. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

Similarly, a few expressed that getting a licence at 18 years of age, regardless of the test process itself, was too young to ensure mature and experienced driving in the roads and that the legal age should be increased to minimise recklessness, immaturity, and inexperience. Conversely, one participant explained that getting one's licence at a younger age would better prepare people for driving on the roads by allowing them more time gaining experience behind the wheel.

*I'm just saying like I still think it's too young, I just think it's too young. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*Make it a priority in high schools to have people getting their licence while they are younger. I don't know like just to make it a compulsory part of schooling. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

A few participants also asserted that people needed to be retested throughout the course of their life to maintain correct driving behaviour and to minimise poor driving habits (as seen in older drivers).

*There needs to be retesting as well, some of these people are 70 years old they're too cautious and don't know what to do and they need to be retested to see if they're fit to drive – regularly as well, all throughout your life, not just when you hit 70 you start getting retested, once every 10 years maybe you get retested or something. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*I think everyone should be reviewed you get too complacent on the road, you just forget some of the rules and they introduce new rules. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

### **Personal driving responsibility**

Several male and female participants across all regions mentioned that it was the responsibility of individual drivers to keep the roads safe, by driving sensibly and respectfully. The idea that road safety was in the hands of each individual driver was more openly acknowledged by female rather than male participants. It must be noted, however, that this notion was generally expressed by the idea that it was others on the road that created dangerous situations and caused accidents rather than themselves (e.g. other less skilled drivers, the council or VicRoads, etc.). As previously mentioned, road safety responsibility was externalised by many whereby 'driver responsibility' meant the responsibility of other drivers rather than themselves. Only until the conversation prompted them to directly discuss the role their own behaviour played was the issue of personal responsibility directed towards themselves.

*You're responsible for how you drive. You're the person in control of the vehicle. (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*Yeah. It can't be up to half a dozen cops to make sure everyone's doing the right thing. Everyone knows if they're doing something wrong. We still all do it. But it's got to come down to the individual too. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*People know what their abilities are and they should stick to that. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*Well, I believe everybody – even every driver, everyday drivers. We can all take our own little notes and improve our driving ability, but the same token, there's got to be people...the dickheads have got to be taken off the road. The truckies have to be put through heavy drug testing as well as fatigue testing... (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*People on the road... just other people around you. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*



## 4. Defining risky driving

This section provides respondents' perspectives on risky driving, related to both their own risk taking driving behaviours and that of others. The section begins by providing an overview of whether respondents perceived a difference between risky driving and dangerous driving. A description of risk-taking behaviour according to respondents is then outlined, followed by their views on external and environmental factors which also contributed to risky driving.

### 4.1. Risky driving and dangerous driving

Respondents were asked in the groups whether they felt there was a difference between risky driving and dangerous driving. Many respondents made a distinction with risk relating more to activities that carried a 'risk' of getting caught but danger being potentially causing harm to one-self or others.

*I would think of risky driving as 'oh if I get caught I'm going to get a fine' whereas dangerous driving is not just going to hit you and hit your pocket, you know it's going to affect other people around you too (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

Others felt that risky driving was less 'deliberate' than dangerous driving; risky driving could happen without realising it, for example, someone's speed creeping up or 'taking a corner a bit too fast'.

*Yeah going a bit faster on the freeway than you should just 'cause you're running late, that's risky, it's probably not dangerous (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

Speeding was often given as an example of risky driving, whereas dangerous driving examples were more commonly related to other activities such as doing burn-outs or drink-driving as well as activities that it was perceived would put others at risk of harm.

*Yeah I think dangerous driving implies a danger to other people (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

*Dangerous [driving] is either endangering yourself or other people in general (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

A small minority of respondents felt that risky driving and dangerous driving were the same thing.

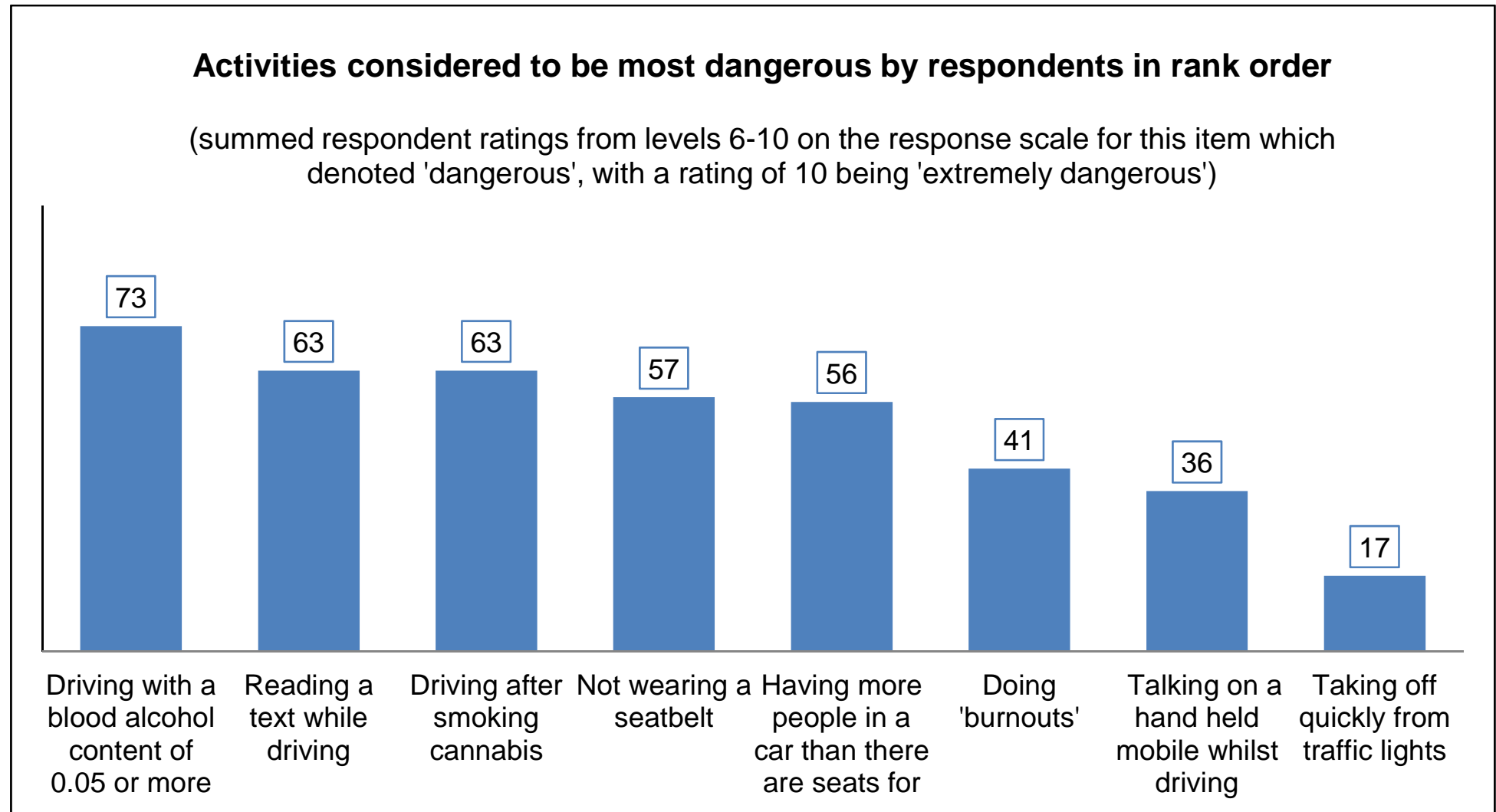
*They're the same thing, if you take a risk, you're in danger (Group 10 older males)*

However, in the focus groups whilst many admitted they took risks whilst driving, none said that they drove dangerously.

Respondents' views on specified dangerous driving activities were also captured within the self-completion questionnaire. This revealed that the most dangerous driving from the provided list was seen as drink-driving, followed by texting and

driving after smoking cannabis. Doing 'burn-outs', talking on the phone and taking off quickly from traffic lights were seen as far less dangerous. Interestingly, females were more likely to give the activities a higher 'danger' score than males, particularly for drink-driving, driving whilst smoking cannabis, reading a text whilst driving and having more people in the car than there are seats for. A similar pattern emerges when looking at differences between the two age groups (18-24 and 25-34), with the older age group tending to give activities a higher 'danger' score than their younger counterparts – particularly for the four activities named above.

**Figure 4.1** Defining risky driving



n = 92

## 4.2. Risk-taking behaviour

Participants were asked to describe what they considered to be risky driving. It was generally expressed that what made a particular behaviour risky (or not risky) was contextual, whereby a number of factors needed to be taken into consideration when assessing the potential risk. Further, as mentioned in section 4.1 above, the determination that a particular behaviour was 'risky' depended on the participant's interpretation of what the risk was and what the consequences may be, for example, being seen by the police, or having an accident. The issues of assessing risk in relation to context and consequence as mediating factors is discussed in greater detail in sections 5 and 6 below.

It was left to the participants to bring up the behaviours they considered risky, and why. The most commonly mentioned behaviours included speeding, using a mobile phone whilst driving, drink driving, and general reckless behaviour.

### 4.2.1. Driving fast/speeding

Speeding was consistently the first response mentioned by participants when asked about risky driving behaviours, yet across all groups, almost all participants admitted to speeding to some degree. Similarly, all groups mentioned that it was common to see others speeding on the roads in their local areas.

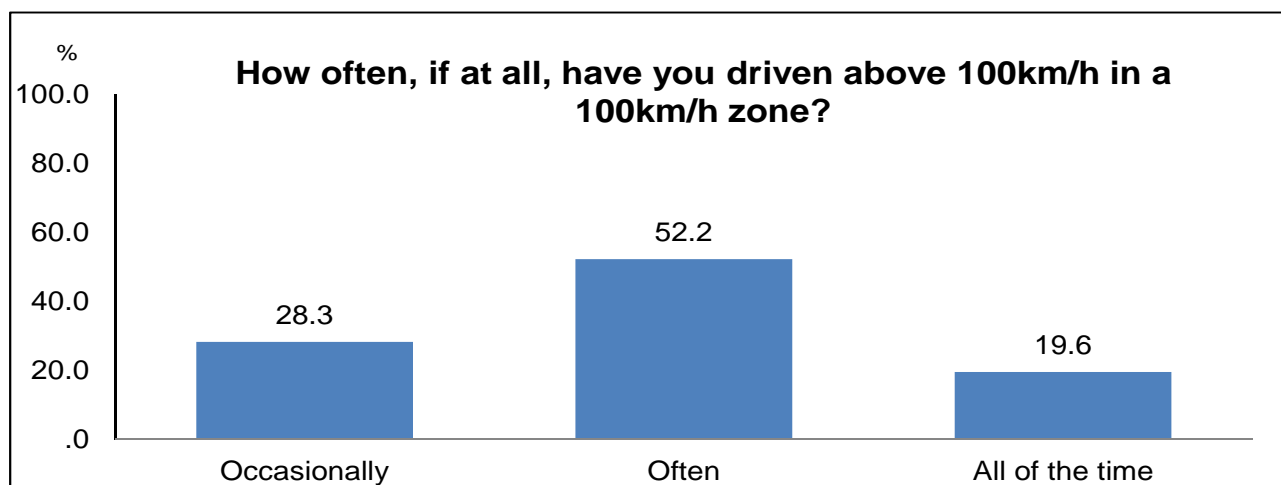
The risks involved with driving above the speed limit were dependent on the context of the behaviour; generally, driving 5-15km above the speed limit was considered normal and minimally risky, particularly when on an open road or highway. However, generally, participants expressed that driving above the speed limit in built up or school zones was unacceptable behaviour that was rarely engaged in. There were very few participants who did not speed at times, and generally this was because they were at a greater risk of losing their license, due to already missing demerit points, for instance.

*Like, by speeding like doing seventy in a sixty zone that's alright but people who go hooking through the hills at a hundred and fifty ... just seems pointless. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*10k's over is kind of just like pretty standard. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

From the self-completion survey data, over half of individuals reported that they often drove over the 100km speed limit and a further fifth said that they did so all of the time (Figure 4.2), which is supported by the qualitative findings suggesting that speeding is a relative norm among this group.

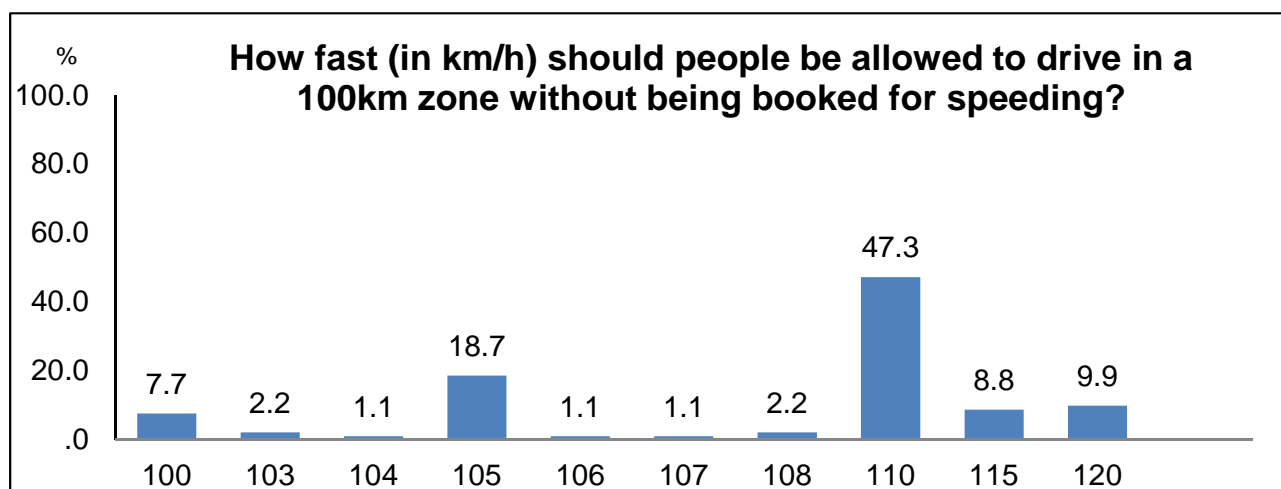
**Figure 4.2 Speeding**



n = 92

This relatively high level of reported excessive speeding may be associated with a majority view that people should be allowed to drive at 110km or more without being booked for speeding, as illustrated below (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3 Views on speed limit enforcement**



n = 92

**4.2.2. Using mobile phones and other electronic devices**

Mobile phone use while driving – both texting and talking, but more commonly the latter – was frequently engaged in by participants across all groups. It was, in many cases, considered to be a norm amongst participants and their peers. Talking on the phone was considered risky in that your attention was divided, and more so with texting which was considered to divert even more concentration away from the road and driving. A number of female participants mentioned that they occasionally checked their Facebook pages whilst driving. Similarly, a number of participants mentioned using a GPS or similar machine whilst driving, and generally considered this to be as risky as handling a phone behind the wheel.

Figure 4.1 above shows that reading a text was considered to be the second most dangerous activity from the options given in the self-completion questionnaire.

*Yeah texting on their phones chronically around here when they're driving. (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*...yeah and if you're text messaging no one's gonna see that. Uh, except text messaging is actually, you can run off the road more than you do on the phone. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*I don't have a GPS and I use it on my iPhone and. It's hard like if, I drive all over the place as well and, I don't know, it's really bad (Group 12 older females Buninyong)*

*And I think it's a distraction, especially texting. I've got to take my eyes off the road. I have before...this is horrible, but I've ended up in a different lane on the freeway, so lucky there wasn't a car there or I would have been in trouble. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*Text messaging is worse than drink-driving I reckon. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

### **4.2.3. Drink driving**

Drink driving was commonly mentioned as a risky behaviour by participants across all groups before the issue was prompted for. Generally, males were far more likely to admit to drink driving than females across all groups, however it was uniformly acknowledged that driving above the 0.05 BAC limit was not uncommon in the regional areas. As with many risky driving behaviours, most participants explained that they were more likely to have driven under the influence of alcohol when they were younger, and less likely to do so as they got older. Conversely, a small number of participants, both male and female, explained that they were more cautious when they had first gotten their license and then gradually engaged in more risky or illegal behaviours as they became more experienced on the roads and learned that they could generally get away with doing it.

As with most other behaviours discussed, the extent to which drink driving was considered risky depended heavily on context and the type of risks involved. It was far more common for females to think of drink driving as uniformly unacceptable, whereas for many males, factors such as who the driver was, the amount of alcohol consumed, the distance to travel, and the roads to be driven all played a part in the assessment of the situation. The most common situation in which a female drove under the influence was when she was uncertain of being over the 0.05 BAC limit after having just one or two drinks.

*I know a lot of people that do a lot like all the time and I don't like that and I've made it pretty clear that it's a stupid thing to do. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*There's probably a lot more drink driving than I'd want to see from my mates. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*I was going to say pretty much everyone I've come in contact with down here I know someone who has drink drive (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

*I haven't done it in a while but, yeah, done before. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

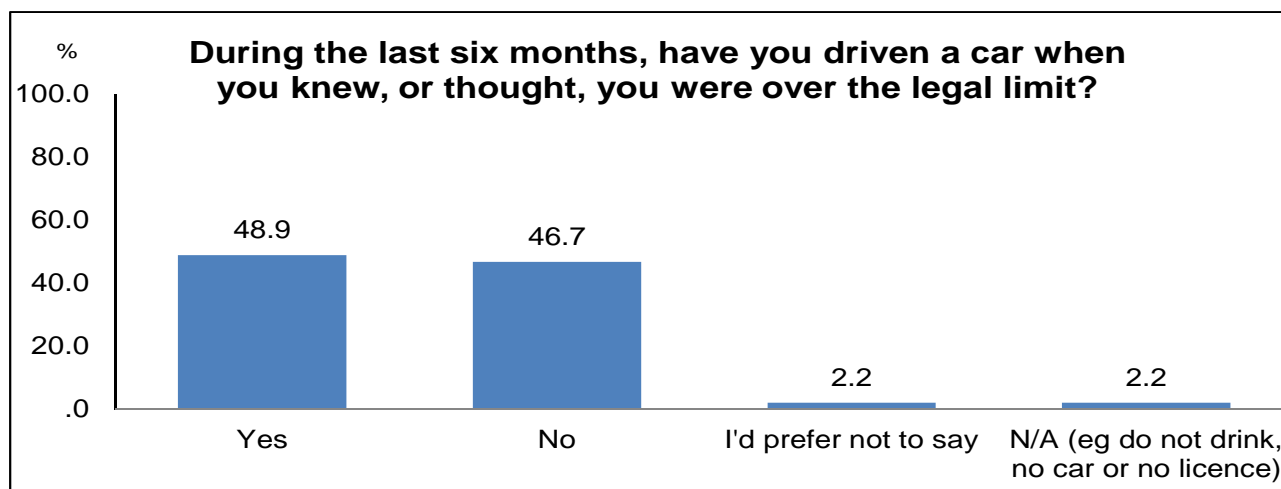
*Like if I've had anywhere between well ten beers and I can still function properly I'll go drive a car (group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*I've had like two drinks and then thought 'ooh if I got caught now would I be over or not'? (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

As with above, the risks involved in getting a lift with someone who had been drinking (Scenario 1) were understood as dependent on the specific circumstances of a situation. Generally, however, females were far more likely to disregard these variables (how drunk the driver was, how familiar they were with the driver, etc.) and claim that they would avoid getting in the car, whereas males more frequently admitted to assessing the situation to decide whether it was ok to ride as a passenger with a driver over the legal limit.

In the self-completion survey, around half of the sample admitted that they had driven over the legal BAC limit at some point in the previous six months (Figure 4.4). Almost twice as many males as females admitted to this, and almost twice as many younger people (18-24 year olds) as older people (25-34) admitted to this.

**Figure 4.4 Driving over the legal BAC in the previous 6 months**



n = 92

#### **4.2.4. Hooning and general recklessness**

General recklessness that was considered risky included examples of driving beyond one's perceived control or ability, or driving without taking into consideration the road and/or weather conditions. Further, some mentioned actions such as tailgating, failing to indicate, changing lanes too quickly, and having too many passengers in the car as risky behaviours they had engaged in, or had witnessed others engaging in. Other behaviours considered risky included engaging in other activities that led to distraction such as rolling cigarettes, or putting music on whilst driving.

Another behaviour mentioned as risky was driving an unroadworthy car, particularly on regional roads, which were often unsealed.

*...going fast around corners when it's wet and just pushing too hard.  
(Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*So just not knowing the area and then going too fast to know all the corners. (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*Cutting off and tailgating and just intimidating driving (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

#### **4.2.5. Drug driving**

Before prompting for discussion, the act of drug driving was brought up as a risky behaviour in just a few groups. Males were far more likely to admit to drug driving than females, although almost all participants knew others who had engaged in the behaviour. Despite this, driving under the influence of drugs was considered to be less of a problem compared to drink driving in these areas, as it was reportedly less common.

Across both male and female groups, it was common for participants to explain that driving after having smoked marijuana was particularly unsafe, and something that they would not do. Similarly, there were several males and females who explained that they had done so when they were younger, but would not feel safe doing so now. Conversely, some explained that driving whilst stoned made one slower and more cautious behind the wheel, and thus was not an unsafe thing to do.

Drugs mentioned as having been used were commonly marijuana and speed. In one particular group (Group 6 older males Broadford) driving under the influence of either speed or marijuana was reportedly not uncommon. One participant, a truck driver, explained that he frequently drove on speed, and he claimed that it made him a better driver. A number of other males in this group agreed that amphetamines did make drivers more aware, and thus, better drivers. Interestingly, it was not uncommon for participants (male and female) to consider driving under the influence of drugs, both amphetamines and marijuana, as safer than driving drunk.

Again, driving under the influence of drugs was something that participants had done more frequently when younger.

*It's the same again, as I was saying before, there's lots of people that drive on drugs like a gang that I know, they do that all the time.  
(Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*I did. I've been in the car with people that are stoned off their face, and I've also been stoned when I was younger and drove, and it's something that's scares the shit out of me now, like driving, and worried about other people smoking, because when I was stoned and driving you kind of don't really know what's going on, it's way worse than drunk. Drunk you've still got sensibility. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*



*See, that's the thing, even with the truckies...good on them for taking something like that because they're on the road for so long. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*I find I'm more aware on drugs. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*But I think both drugs have a different ... reaction on you I think alcohol's more dangerous. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

#### **4.2.6. Driving whilst tired**

Driving fatigued was brought up unprompted by a small number of participants, but was commonly thought to be highly risky across all groups. A number of participants, male and female, mentioned occasions when they had fallen asleep in their car when parked or pulled over, and some explained that they had done so while stopped at traffic lights, or, on a few occasions, whilst driving. Driving whilst tired was believed to happen frequently due to the long distances driven in regional areas, and the desire to get home as quickly as possible.

*And that was like an hour and a half commute every day and the amount of times I would be driving home, you sit at a set of lights and you doze off because you're just, you've done eight hours plus you know three hours over the whole day of driving, it just really takes it out, you know. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*I've found myself driving in the left lane of the freeway, you have a snooze and you're off in the grass on the right. It'd happen. It used to happen to me a lot, living in Seymour, working in Melbourne. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

#### **4.2.7. No seatbelts**

Driving or riding as a passenger in a car without a seatbelt was not a behaviour freely mentioned when prompted on risk taking. This is most likely due to the fact that very few participants admitted to not wearing a seatbelt; for almost all, putting a seatbelt on was an ingrained habit that they performed without thinking each time they got in a car. Nevertheless, there existed across both male and female groups, a small number of participants who did not generally wear them. A small number of females explained that they wore their seatbelt beneath their arm instead of have it across their chest.

*I don't think I have an issue with not actually wearing my seatbelt; I just always put it underneath my arm. (Group 9 younger females Buninyong)*

*I thought it was like, isn't that what you do? You get in, it's the first thing I do is put my seatbelt on (Group 3 younger males Gembrook)*

It must be noted that a small number of participants mentioned that they believed seatbelts could cause more damage than they prevented in the case of an accident. Similarly, the idea that wearing a seatbelt protected others in the car in the case of an

accident was only mentioned by one participant; for everyone else, wearing a seatbelt determined the safety of the wearer only, and thus it was not a big deal to ask others travelling in a car to wear one. When discussing Scenario 2, most participants explained that it would not be a big deal and that, if they happened to notice that someone was not wearing a seatbelt, they might say something but would not feel the need to push the issue.

*He's only endangering himself really though. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*My step mum had an accident once and she wasn't wearing a seat belt and they actually told her if she had have been wearing it she would have died. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

*But people also in car accidents get a lot more hurt with a seatbelt (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

*You wearing a seatbelt isn't going to help the guy next to you in an accident. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

### **4.3. Environmental/external factors**

This section outlines respondents' description of external or environmental factors (that is, perceived as not relating to individual attributes or behaviour) that they felt also contributed to risky driving.

#### **4.3.1. Road type/conditions**

The condition of the local roads was the most commonly mentioned external factor affecting road safety whilst driving, particularly relating to poor road surfacing and a large amount of pot-holes (mentioned over 100 times across the 12 groups). Avoiding pot holes was said to be hazardous as it could result in unexpected swerves; however, the alternative could result in damage to the car steering and tyres. According to most, these problems were caused by a lack of road maintenance.

*So if you don't avoid it you risk doing damage to your car, you might as well cross it anyway and if you do avoid it at the last minute, when you just see [it] you might do something dangerous like hit another car (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*Really bad, yeah – because I go out to my husband's parents' farm which is out like just out of Broadford – potholes everywhere. You get dragged off the road (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*With the weather there's a lot of damaged roads, they don't even repair it, they just put a sign there saying 'slow down, road hazard' and it would sit there for, like, six months (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

Poor road surfaces were said to be made worse by wet weather; it was felt by some that the recent winter had been particularly wet (in Gembrook particularly) and had adversely affected the road surface as well as washing away the contents of the pot holes that had been filled. A particular problem noted in the Gembrook area was the hilly and windy roads, with rough steep edges at the sides. According to respondents, this meant that if there was a need to pull over (for example, a large truck approaching or avoiding a pot hole) there were limited safe places to do so.

*There's not much traffic but when you turn around that corner and there's a truck going down the middle of the road to avoid potholes it's terrifying (Group 4 older females, Gembrook)*

*But you could pick five corners between here and Emerald that when they're dry they're fine, but if there's a little bit of rain on it, oh it's just, at night or something you hit the corner and you just start sliding. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

#### **4.3.2. Adverse weather**

Adverse weather conditions – notably heavy rain – were felt to affect road safety. Where roads were windy and narrow (notably in the Gembrook area) this was thought to be a particular hazard, especially if someone was unfamiliar with the roads or there were particular areas of the roads where water could collect. Fog was commonly mentioned in Gembrook, and ice was mentioned by one person in the Broadford group. In forested areas such as Gembrook, falling trees during bad weather was also thought to be an unavoidable safety hazard; there were several examples of narrow escapes and accidents as a result of fallen trees in the road.

*Knowing hazard lights when there's like rain or fog and that sort of thing and having your lights on. (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*And the Gembrook fog as well, like you get and it's just really thick ones like and then it's gone. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

*Black ice doesn't help either... It's when there's condensation on the road and it's that cold that it freezes. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

#### **4.3.3. Rurality and infrastructure**

All were agreed that driving in regional or rural areas brought additional specific risks that were less prevalent in metropolitan areas. The main two factors discussed here relating to road safety were darkness (poor street lighting) and wildlife. Several mentioned poor infrastructure, including a serious lack of public transport, and for some, not enough signage to indicate the legal driving limits, particularly in areas where the speed limits fluctuated frequently, e.g. from a school zone, to a freeway, to a residential street.

*I drive that road all the time and night and even sometimes I can barely see where I'm going 'cause it's a busy road and you can't have your lights on high (Group 12 older females Buninyong)*

*Pedestrians that you can't see because the streets aren't lit up properly (Group 8 older females, Broadford)*

*Oh constantly changing speed limits like going along Albert Street into town there's about five or six changes in the space of under a kilometre... (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*I put my hand up doing the wrong thing but there's so many speed limit changes and it's easy to get caught doing seventy in a sixty zone, or eighty in a seventy zone, like where it's changed (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

Animals on the roads were noted as common and unpredictable across all three regions and in almost all groups. Wildlife was considered to be one of the major issues related to road safety, and was something that participants claimed they remained mindful of when driving on their local roads.

Most respondents were able to recount examples of where they had either narrowly avoided or hit wildlife whilst driving.

*Well I've had three near misses quite recently, one was a deer, one was a 'roo sitting right there and one was a wombat so it does make you wary. You've got to have good lights. (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*... a deer ran out in front of me and [I] hit the deer and sort of swerved a bit and had me trailer on as well and ended up in a ditch and then hit a tree (Group 4 young males Gembrook)*

*Yeah, well and truly because you've got animals. Like, where I am I've got animals, and so has the Mrs, so you're more concentrating on them than you are...it's when you get in the city and that it's a breeze. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

#### **4.3.4. Other drivers**

In all groups, respondents felt that certain drivers took more risks or caused more potential danger than other drivers. In some cases it was felt that this was unintentional. Drivers were generalised into fairly consistent groupings; most commonly reported as displaying poor driving were females (by males), non-locals, P-platers, and older drivers.

*There's a lot of dickheads that don't know the rules. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*I think that like you've got to look out for people that don't know what they're doing. Like you can see that they don't know what they're doing so you just sort of have to hang back and be like, 'not going near them'. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

In three of the four male groups it was felt that women in general did not have the same driving skills or confidence as their male counterparts, and as a result were more 'risky' in their driving. Interestingly, it was brought up in both a male and female groups the idea that women were likely to have a different type of accident compared to men, i.e. men were thought of as more likely to take calculated and intentional risks, whereas women were more likely to take more thoughtless, unskilled or distracted risks.

*They're just not as aware I think as guys are because guys understand cars a lot more than girls do (Group 11, young males, Buninyong)*

*They're just poorer quality drivers (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*Stupid accidents where they cause more poor driving accidents like we might speed and come off whereas they'd just...*

*- Pull out in front of somebody (Group 3 younger males Gembrook)*

*Like I think girls are in the like you know texting, ran up someone's bum kind of thing...*

*- At lower speeds they have accidents*

*- But guys might have more high speed (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

It was common across all regions for participants to exclaim that non-locals were generally worse drivers than locals when in the area. This was explained as either being due to their unfamiliarity with the roads, or the conditions on general, or because they believed city drivers to be less skilled than people in the country.

*Yeah and when you're behind someone that's not from around here then that's bad. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*It's also the ones from overseas that are mid-20s that have never driven in Australian conditions opposed to their conditions. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

Similarly, some respondents felt that 'old people' and, on the other end of the spectrum, inexperienced P-platers could be risky drivers.

*Old people, they cause problems. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*Yeah, P-platers are over-confident and older people are under-confident ... yeah too cautious versus under-cautious (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*He was also a P-plater and all my almost every near miss or every person that has confronted me after a near miss has been a P-plater, believing that they were in the right. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

In other cases, it was felt that some other road users took deliberate risks. Mentions were also made (by females only) of truck drivers and motorcyclists. In particular, the female groups in Broadford mentioned that truck drivers often drove in unsafe ways on highways, making some participants feel vulnerable in their vicinity on the roads. In a few other groups, the issue of pedestrians and cyclists increasing risk on the roads was also mentioned.

*And they don't move over, they fall asleep, they crash a lot in this area. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*Sometimes they're fatigued and they swerve all over the road and oh it's scary and then they'll overtake you (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

*Motorbikes: there's a lot of motorbikes, unregistered, that hoon around Broadford. Like, on footpath, rule the streets, like, with little kids that run out, they don't slow down because they're not registered (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*They've got a bike lane, why don't they ride in the bike lane? (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

*And a lot of cyclists or bicycles come up here and yeah. That's scary, cyclists. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

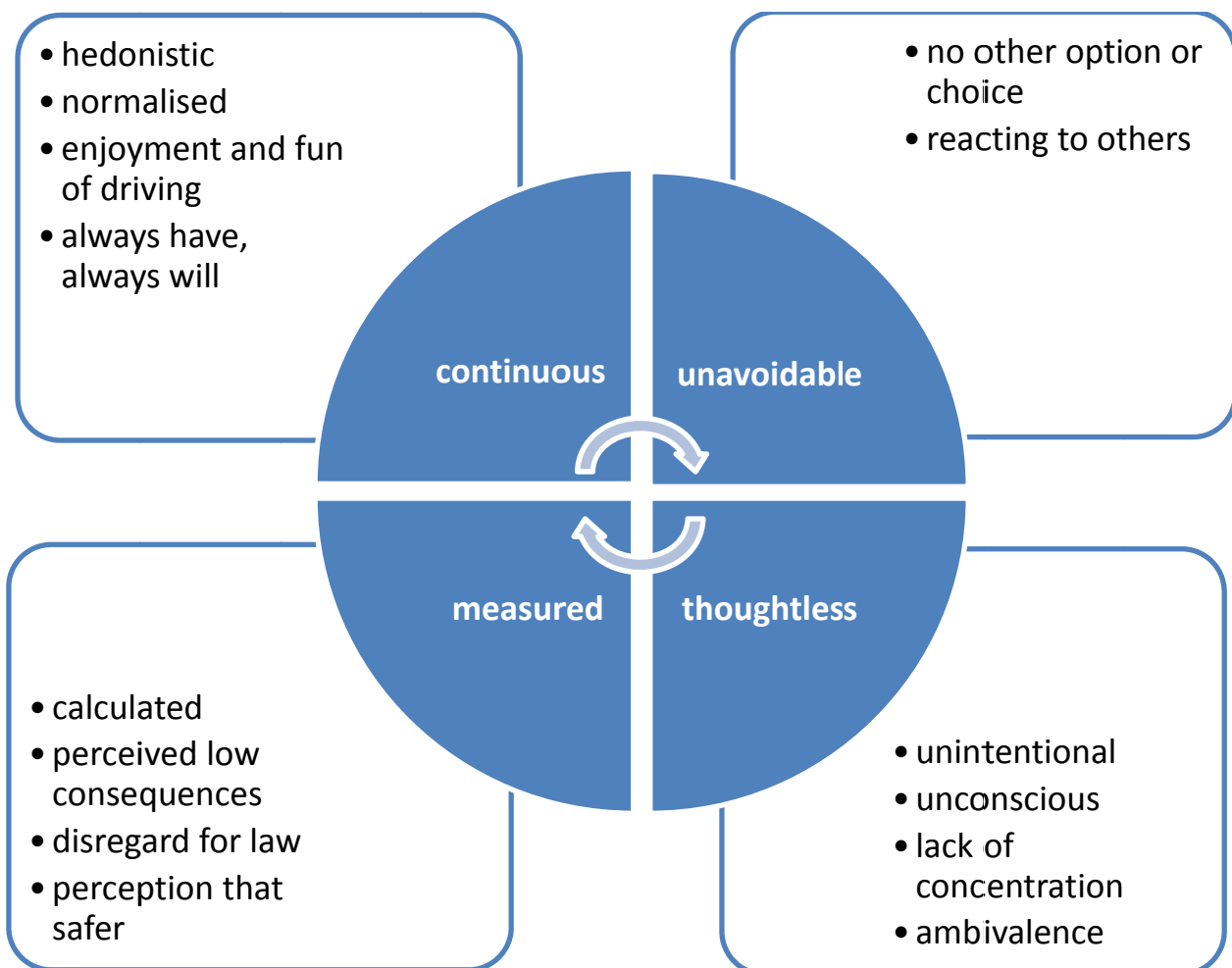
## 5. Typologies of risky driving behaviour

All risky driving behaviours discussed throughout the groups were prefaced by participants' explanations for engaging in such behaviour. That is, the risks that they took on the roads were assessed and consequently justified in some way. What the discussions and subsequent analysis has shown is that, broadly speaking, there are four different typologies of risky driving behaviour. These are:

- unavoidable/reactive risks
- thoughtless/unintentional risks
- measured/calculated risks, and
- continuous risks.

These typologies can be summarised as follows:

**Figure 5.1** Typologies of risky driving behaviour





Patterns across these typologies – in terms of who takes what kinds of risks – are varied. In the main, examples of all of these risk taking behaviours were evident within and across the groups. Nevertheless there were some differences and these are included in the more detailed discussion of each category of risky driving that follows.

It should be noted that these ‘justifications’ are not reported as objective, but rather they are based on the subjective reasoning of the drivers themselves.

### 5.1. “Unavoidable” (reactive) risk taking

*You can't walk it or catch a cab. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

This type of risk taking is considered by the driver to be unavoidable in that at the time of engaging in the risk taking behaviour there seem to be no other options left to the individual. The term ‘unavoidable’ must be taken loosely however, as it is almost always the case that there is another option available to the driver, including choosing not to drive at all.

The types of ‘unavoidable’ risky driving common to participants included driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or driving without a valid license because there was no other way of getting around at the time. A common complaint was the lack of public transport or taxi services in these regional areas, which was said to make getting home almost impossible without driving or being driven by a friend. This was the most common justification for driving under the influence of alcohol in all three regions. Further, the cost of such cab rides was considered unaffordable by many. This common situation of not having another option of getting home also led to there being more passengers in the car than was legal.

*Well it would help if they had better public transport at night and more taxis going, 'cause I've been at the pub a few times, drank a bit and ended up jumping in the car (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*There's like, you drink at a friend's place, and even though it's only a ten minute drive down the road, you can't get home unless you call someone else that isn't there. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

A number of participants explained that driving above the speed limit was done because of the unavoidable lengthy distances that had to be travelled on a daily basis when living in non-metropolitan regional areas. Likewise, risky behaviours such as overtaking at great speed, or on an unsuitable stretch of road were often considered to be unavoidable reactions to others on the road.

Driving fatigued was something that a number of participants justified as unavoidable also, because they simply wanted to get somewhere and stopping was not considered an option.

*That person that just infuriated me for ten minutes and they're not doing, sometimes they're doing twenty k's under the speed limit, and it does, I'm thinking this is impinging on my time I want to just get*



*home and start cooking tea or something like that. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*And I think speeding is more dominant in these rural areas because you do have far to travel compared to, like, when I get into Melbourne I don't speed. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

A few of male participants explained that they engaged in risky or hoon-like behaviour on public roads because they did not have the option of doing so at affordable and local venues purpose-built for such driving. According to these participants, there used to exist venues that provided this service, but they were no longer open.

*I got done by dragging unmarked cop cars, all that kind of stuff so, but there's no place in this area to go do it. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*They say like you can't do it full-stop but they don't give them any alternative to go ok if you come down to a big car park on Saturday, police can be there, we fence it off and you do as many burnouts as you like. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*When I was younger, me and all my mates we used to go and do burnouts in the car park shopping centres when they were empty at night. But then they started putting gates after then, trying to keep us out of it. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

## **5.2. “Thoughtless” (unintentional) risk taking**

*I don't really think. I just do. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

This type of risk taking involves a more subtle, unconscious form of justification by the driver and is engaged in with a relatively low level of personal responsibility for risk and danger on the roads. Thoughtless or unintentional risk taking was common amongst males and females from all regions. Generally, these risks occurred because of boredom, a lack of concentration, or general ambivalence. These include accidental speeding, or unintentionally driving over the BAC limit when unsure whether they are over or not.

*I was just driving along the Great Ocean Road and just, you know, thinking about something else and all of a sudden I was 15k's over. You're not even thinking about it, you know? You're literally just out of it. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*When coming up here I was looking at me GPS, and I didn't realise I was sitting on 75 and I'm here. Didn't know, didn't mean to but it happened – shit happens. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*When you're in the car it's like it's almost not a reality, it's like your car's still and all the stuff's just moving past you, kind of, when you're driving... you've got this comfort zone, you're warm, you're comfortable, it's quiet... The risks don't seem real enough because of your environment. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

*I'm constantly late for everything. And even if I'm not running late I'm like 'Oh I'm making good time let's get there early' and then I just get bored and just want to get there as soon as possible. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

Related to this unintentional behaviour are actions that can be considered ingrained or habitual to the individual and thus engaged in with little thought or contemplation. The most common forms of this habitual risky behaviour were speeding and using a mobile phone device behind the wheel, and also included failing to wear a seatbelt, or driving without paying much attention. Some participants explained that this behaviour became more common as they got older, more confident and less diligent as a driver.

*I reckon as soon as you get it [suspended license] back, you're like "oh, doing the right thing, doing the right thing," then month, two months go past and you're back in the same habit. It's autopilot pretty much. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*I don't get much time in the day 'cause I'm managing the factory so I'm always flat out, if I just in the car, something I do straight away is jump on the phone... I know it's not good and it's a bad habit. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*Like I just, it's not my natural instinct to put on a seatbelt for some reason. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

*Not really I think everyone gets more confident and does worse things... I don't do head checks as much... I guess you just forget. (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

The types of risks that could be categorised as unconsidered also include those where the perpetrator appears to have an unrealistic or misguided sense of what was risky or dangerous. This included behaviours considered inconsequential such as failing to wear a seatbelt or driving with too many passengers in the car; some participants did not consider these behaviours dangerous because they did not *increase the chance* of having an accident; it was only dangerous on the condition that there was an accident. The second quote below expresses one participant's prior assumption that driving under the influence of drugs was not risky.

*Well if you've got two people in the back of your car and you're just cruising home... And the rest of your car's full, they're not gonna make you have an accident. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*Up until a couple of years ago I didn't see drugs as a – I don't do drugs but all my friends did. I didn't see it as an issue, I was getting in the car with them I was thinking 'well as long as they're not drinking' because that was what was advertised about. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

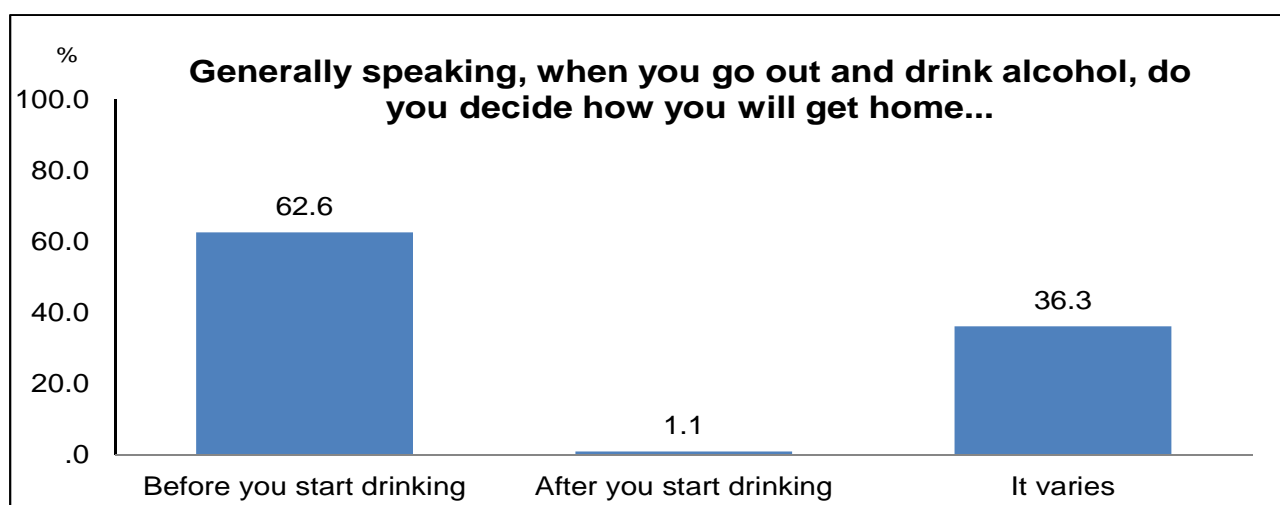
Similarly, it was common across all groups for participants to express (and in some cases, acknowledge) that they had an unrealistic perception of risk because they had never experienced a negative consequence of their risky behaviour, or that they had had an unrealistic perception of risk up until the time they had an accident or near-miss. This thoughtless or ambivalent attitude to risk taking was seen to be far more common in younger drivers, as discussed in more detail in section 6 of this report. Despite this, many participants still commonly admitted to engaging in risky driving with ambivalence. This often involved engaging in a behaviour carelessly, without giving thought to the potential consequences.

*You don't think about it, you just go out and you just sink cans and you know by that stage everyone's off their heads. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*You don't really think it's even a choice, you just do it. And then it's later on you think 'Oh maybe I shouldn't be doing this'. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

These unplanned, or thoughtless risks in relation to drink driving was evident in the questionnaire; although almost no-one said that they decided how to get home *after* they started drinking and almost two thirds said they did so *before* they started drinking, over a third of the sample indicated that *it varied*, suggesting that on some occasions there was no specific plan for transport home on a night out (Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2 Unplanned risks – planning transport home after drinking**



n = 92

### 5.3. “Measured” (calculated) risk taking

This type of risk taking shares similarities with the ‘unavoidable’ and ‘thoughtless’ risk taking types, but is different in that measured risks involve a larger process of personal assessment and consequent justification based on the particulars of a specific situation the driver is in.

Whilst discussing a range of risk taking behaviours engaged in, many participants claimed that while the action was generally considered illegal or risky, it was not risky at that time due to certain variables, including, for example, their own driving ability, or the driving conditions. For many, a risk could be considered acceptable if there was little chance of consequence, where the consequence could be an accident or police apprehension. In this sense, these risks can be considered ‘measured’, in that the consequences are taken into account (either accurately, or inaccurately) and an active decision is made to take the ‘calculated’ risk.

#### 5.3.1. *The law vs. personal assessment*

This type of risk taking was often justified by participants because, in their opinions, the existing road laws were inappropriate or unnecessary. For example, a very common measured risk participants engaged in was speeding 5-20km above the speed limit. For many, slight increases in speed were not considered dangerous, nor did they increase the chances of being caught given the right road or time of day. Deeming minimal (< 30km/h above 100km/h speed limit) speeding acceptable was common to both males and females (see Figure 4.3).

Similarly, several participants exclaimed that P-plates should be allowed to drive V8s, and so they did, despite knowing it was illegal.

*Yeah exactly, I consider myself a safe driver even though I’m not obeying the law all the time. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*There’s heaps of speed limits around here that are way too low like it’s just annoying that they’ve even done that ‘cause it’s not like it’s unsafe to be doing eighty there or whatever. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*That thing about highways as well, I don’t consider going 120 on the highway risky at all, the highway’s straight and it’s one of the safest roads you can drive on. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*It’s a V8 yeah, and because I’m on my P-plates I’m not supposed to drive it, but, you know I do. Like, just because it’s a V8 I don’t be silly in it. I’m not the type of person. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

Some illegal behaviours were considered to be safer than obeying the road rules at times, for example, overtaking at a high speed, or driving in the middle of the road at night time in order to avoid the unsealed roadsides or wildlife (in Gembrook particularly, because of the narrow, winding roads).

*Whenever there's a truck on the highway like I think it's safer to go round a truck at a 140 than it is to go around it at 110 or whatever – like 10kms faster and sit there and wait. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*And especially at night time where you can see the headlights coming towards you. So if there's no headlights coming towards you, you just take the whole road. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

In making a personal assessment of risk that disregarded the law, many participants explained that they drew a line at particular behaviours that they themselves assessed to be genuinely risky, and therefore, to be avoided. That is, what the law stated and what was considered risky were two different things. The contradictions inherent in the quotes below illustrate the spectrum of acceptability that arises when individual assessments of safety and risk are made. These subjective divisions of acceptability and unacceptability were more commonly made by males than females.

*I don't think that anything I do really puts anyone at serious risk of injury because I think I'm a safe driver. I'm not obeying their rules but I'm still driving safely I think. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*I'll get in a car with someone that's completely wasted if they drive sensibly, but I won't get in a car with someone who speeds. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*Everyone I know has a different ability so ... a person in my friendship group would drink-drive, they'll smoke marijuana and drive, and I have the utmost faith in them to get to their destination safe every single time, whereas if they sped they might hurt themselves, so it's just everyone has their different abilities and if they don't push themselves then they're not really risking anything. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*I don't see that my speed is a risk though. I know that sounds ignorant but I'm not a reckless driver. I might drive a bit faster than the limit but I would consider myself even at 110 in a 100 zone or 115 I still feel like I would be just as safe... (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

*I don't think I'd answer my phone unless I felt like I was in control of the car though, so I don't feel like it's super risky in that way. (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

### **5.3.2. Each situation is different - calculating acceptability**

For many participants, the acceptability of behaviours such as drink driving was determined by the specific circumstances. A notable example was that speeding on an open stretch of highway was considered acceptable by many, whereas speeding through a residential zone was not. Similarly, across all groups there were a number of factors that were taken into account when assessing the acceptability of an action such as drink driving or riding as a passenger with a drunk driver. These were:

- the individual capabilities of the driver
- the amount they had to drink
- the distance to travel, and
- The likelihood of getting caught.

All these variables led to the participants making a personal assessment of risk associated with the behaviour. Similarly, the weather and road conditions are taken into account when assessing their behaviour. It was clear throughout the discussions that many hold the belief that they can accurately assess the risks associated with their risky behaviours.

*I don't see it as dangerous if I'm on the Western Freeway where it's two lanes and I'm sitting in the exit lane at a hundred and twenty instead of a hundred and ten or a hundred and twenty-five. (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*I drink drive quite frequently but whilst saying that, I don't I mean I'm completely written off I might have had three beers down the pub and I know I'm going to be over but I still feel alert and fine but there are some times when you've been completely, can't see the road. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

As mentioned in Section 4, some asserted that driving under the influence of alcohol and certain drugs – marijuana or speed – makes some people better drivers than if they were sober.

*I used to smoke a lot of cannabis and drive and I know nobody will agree with this but I still stand by it but for me personally I was so paranoid that I was just constant, I was a better driver. I saved myself and other people from so many situations because I was stoned. (Group 3 older females Gembrook)*

*If you're driving drunk you're gonna be ten times more sensible... If I get in the car, I'll go slide around corners and go fast, but if I'm drunk I'll just drive normal, and just like pay a lot of attention to what I'm doing. (Group 4 young males Gembrook)*

### 5.3.3. Good drivers can break the rules

Many of these risky driving behaviours are justified to the individual by a belief in themselves having above average driving abilities that allay any risks (see Figure 5.3). That is, it was common for participants to see their risk taking/illegal driving behaviour as safe, because they drove within their perceived ability.

*I think I'm a pretty safe driver, yeah. I think I drive to my ability, that's the thing. The thing is, I could drive along a highway going 120 and I can do that safely, and I know I can drive safety like that and I'm not going to cause an accident like that so I don't think there's anything wrong with that. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*Yeah, you think you know better than most people actually do, like I'm the same thing, I've always driven paddock bombs and stuff like that so I think I'd know more about how a car responds and what happens when than most people would. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*Yeah I like to think it's a controlled risk, I have control, if I'm going ten, twenty k's over the limits, I'm in control so I'm pretty confident in my ability, so I don't think in that situation there's that much risk of crashing or anything. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*Risk is self-assessment though. If you know the roads and you've always grown up around them, you might sit on 110/120 because you know the spots, you know where she's clear but if you get someone that's never been in the area before to them to do that, even though you're doing the same speed... (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

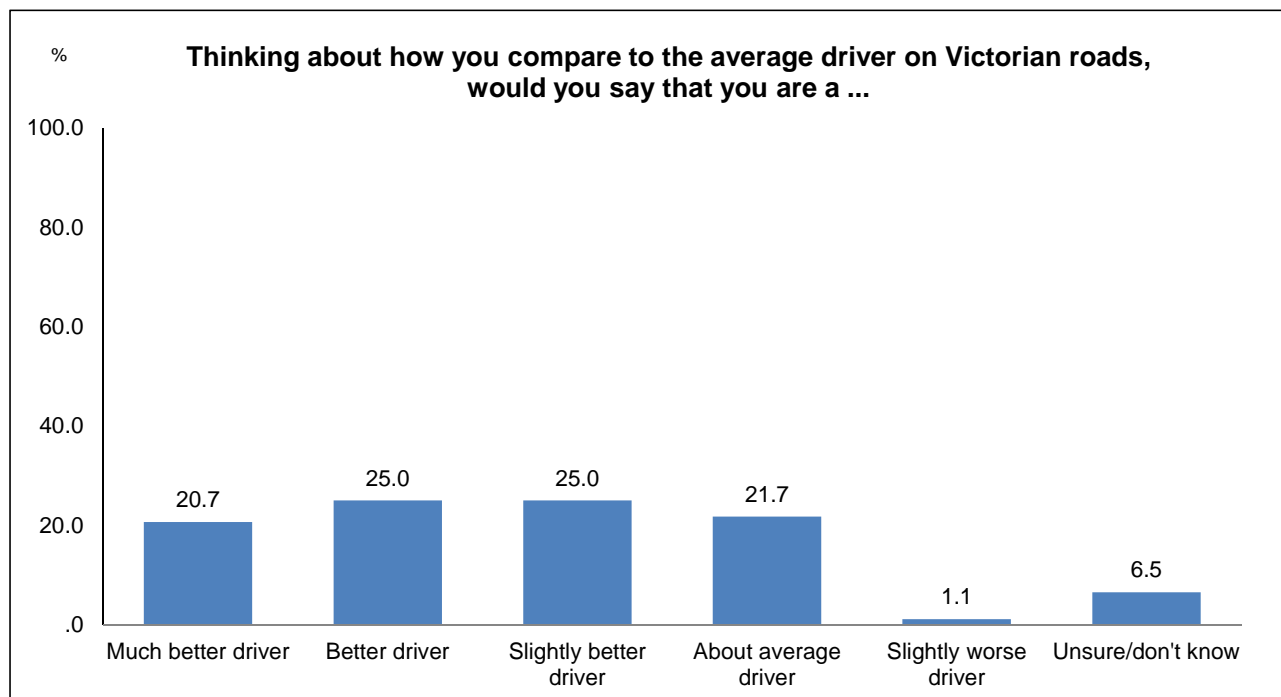
*Well, I don't lose concentration being on the phone. I can still talk and drive. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

A few of participants acknowledged that they had a double standard when it came to how they assessed their own driving compared to others. For instance, it was not uncommon for participants to be angered by other drivers breaking the law or performing risky driving behaviours, but that they were comfortable doing so themselves.

In the self-completion survey, over two thirds of respondents labelled themselves as a better driver than the average driver on Victorian Roads (Figure 5.3). A fifth felt that they were a 'much better driver'.



**Figure 5.3 Self-assessment of driving skills**



n = 92

#### 5.3.4. 'Safe' means getting away with it

It was common for participants to have disregarded the risk of harming themselves or others in their assessment of whether a behaviour was risky or not. Instead, the risk they assessed when deciding whether or not to engage in an illegal behaviour was whether or not they would be apprehended by the police. That is, the idea of 'safety' was very often conceptualised in terms of how likely it is that one will get caught, rather than what might increase their chances of being injured, or injuring others. As the risk of getting caught by the police was considered much more likely than having an accident, this assessment of risk was the most commonly discussed across all groups.

*You do it [text while driving] because you know you're not gonna get caught. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*Have half or a dozen beers and drive home still, cause out of town there were never any coppers, it just happened. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*I don't even think about it... Unless they can see you're pinging off your tits. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*You don't see a cop car at four o'clock in the morning in Gembrook... That's a safe time to drink-drive. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*I drive proper when I know, like, there's cameras. Like, I might do 120 from here to here on the Hume, but I know where there's cameras will be and then I'll back up before I get there. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*



*So if you sit below say 9ks over sometimes they'll just turn a blind eye. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

#### **5.4. “Hedonistic” and normalised risk taking**

*Breaking the rules is life's little bit of fun. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

Continuous risk taking here is conceptualised as risks that are taken intentionally and for its own sake, for example for pleasure or to impress one's peers. It also includes risky behaviours that are engaged in consistently, as, for example, a driving norm, or risky behaviours that are part of how individuals drive at all times.

For many males across all regions, particular risks behind the wheel were undertaken as a pastime that provided great pleasure. Risk taking for the thrill of breaking the rules was also reported by a few males. For these participants, there was no justification other than the enjoyment they got from the activity. Whilst this was the case for a small number of women too, it was far more common for males to engage in.

Pleasure-seeking risk taking was almost always accompanied by a strong interest in cars and car maintenance. It was the participants that engaged in this behaviour as a past time that complained about not having suitable and safe venues to do so (as mentioned in section 5.2).

*I saved all my hard earn and I bought it, and when you buy such a car you don't just want to drive it sedately like a grandpa that owned it before you, you want to put an inter-cooler on it and put a big exhaust on it and boost it and put a bigger turbo on it and do burn-outs and put a clamp on the back brakes and rip it. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*When I had me XR, if the speed limit was 80 I wasn't happy until I was sitting on a hundred, at least. I had to do it. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*I'm trying to think of something that'd stop you doing burnouts, but there's nothing. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*I just like going fast. Maybe that's part of our upbringing because we lived on property, so we did doughnuts in the paddocks, we raced around in the paddocks, we had that. The adrenalin, and it's fun. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

*I've seen and done everything. I've crashed cars pretty bad myself. I've had mates die in cars – sober, drunk, being dickheads. And, yeah, it slows me down for a month or two, but at the end of the day I love throwing the boot into it and that's it, so I still do it. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*You live somewhere where there's not many people around and you're going to do it. You're just going to do skid, a burnout because you just love the noise, the sound...smell (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

Engaging in risky, hoon behaviour when with friends in order to impress them was admitted to by several participants, almost always males. Interestingly, one male participant explained that when he and his friends were on red P-plates and unable to take passengers in the car, they often found themselves driving in convoy, taking risks and racing each other. Conversely, when he drives with friends in his own car he tends to drive more safely.

In one female group it was mentioned that peer pressure had caused one participant to drive drunk on a number of occasions, because her friends expected it of her.

*Well, I don't know if you're with your mates, like you've got a couple of cars with you, and you do something funny like hang off the road or do a bit of a skiddy, hang out the window a little bit, yell at the neighbour, whatever, things like that. (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*I reckon the whole red P's thing is stupid, 'cause when I got my red P's instead of five of us being in one car, there was five people in three cars and you just chase each other and take each other. (Group 3 young males Gembrook)*

*There's one short stretch of road where a friend dared me to get to 140 before the roundabout. I got to 140 before the roundabout but stopping was really hard. (Group 4 older females Gembrook)*

*It is, it was always me just showing off. Always had good cars, bloody V8s, turbos a lot of it and fill the car up with your mates and you want to do a dirty big burnout somewhere and show off. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*From your friends and that 'oh you'll drive, you'll drive home' 'cause they know that I probably will. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

#### **5.4.1. Unlikely to stop risky driving behaviour**

A small group of participants explained that despite getting older, or having been penalised by the police a number of times, they were unlikely to modify their risky driving behaviour. It was, according to these people, just something they had always done, and would most likely continue to do.

*But, yeah, I don't think nothing could change my way. It's like I'm still probably going to call people on my phone, or I'm just probably going to speed on the freeway, like, where there's no cameras. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*They ended up taking me licence off me, withdrew all the fines and that and sent me to court for it, and yeah, they locked me up for 12 months because of it. I drove every day in between, I got caught 12 times unlicensed driving before they really stitched me up. So I just didn't care – just going bananas: burnouts everywhere. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*Like all the laws are set it's just no one really follows them. (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

Similarly, some participants explained that in their opinion, people would always continue to break the road rules and that very little could be done to change that. For example, some risky behaviours, such as speeding and using a mobile phone whilst driving, were admitted to by many participants, and considered to be the norm amongst others, particularly because of the long distances travelled, and also because the roads were often empty in these regional areas.

*It does because you're the inconvenience when you do the speed limit, everyone else is pushing and you've got to go with it. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

*Yes it's definitely socially accepted, everyone does it [mobile phone use whilst driving]. Yeah like my mum does the same thing, she'll yell at me but then I'll ring her and she'll be driving. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*Well probably not so accepted, but yeah – actually yeah it [drink-driving] is, it was accepted, yeah. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*And pretty much with the freeway, like, well, the highway, anyway, it's very mundane, like, it's the same thing every single day. So, "Oh, just a bit faster, bit faster." (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*Most people drive around Ballarat stoned (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

## 6. Perceptions of risk and consequence

The previous section explored why the respondents took the driving risks that they did, and identified four main typologies of risk-taking behaviour, influenced by a range of attitudinal, behavioural and external factors. This section considers the extent to which respondents considered the consequences of risky driving, and how this consideration was influenced by their views on how 'big' a risk was and the likelihood of something happening as a result of taking that risk. The section then considers the kinds of factors that contributed to respondents moderating their risky driving behaviours.

All drivers recruited to this study were included because of their reported risk-taking behaviours (identified at the point of recruitment). Nevertheless, it was evident that there was some variation in risk taking attitudes and behaviours, both by type of person (differentiated here by age group and gender) as well as by the nature of the risky driving.

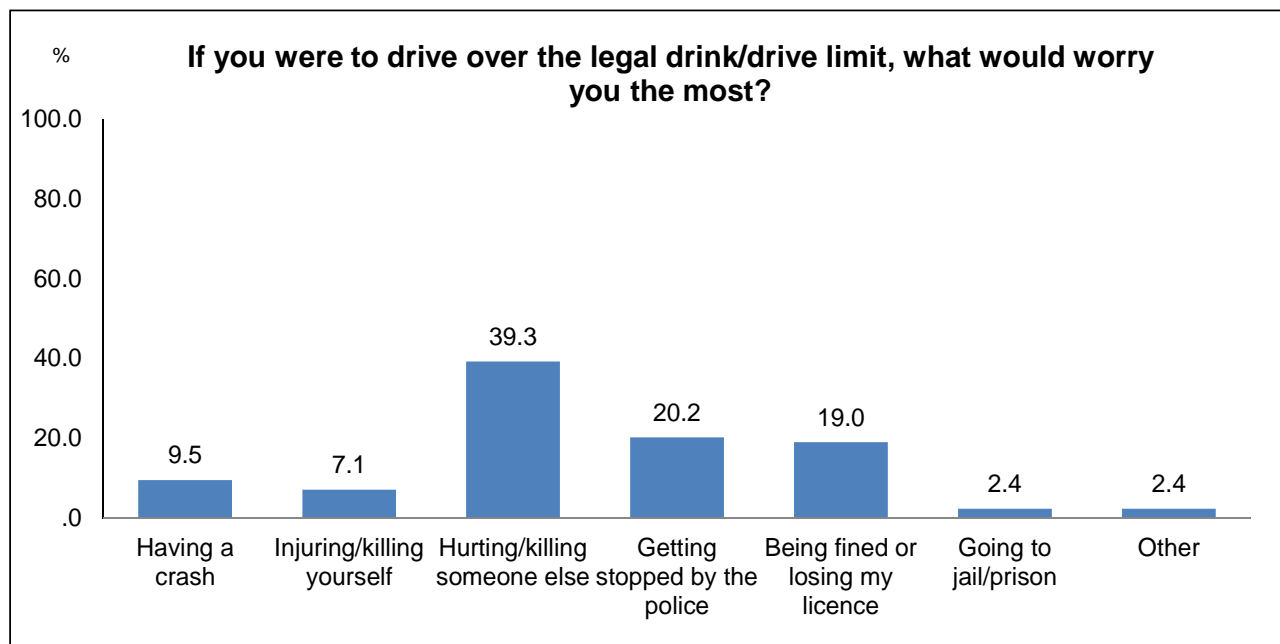
### 6.1. Risks and Consequences

Previous regional research undertaken for the TAC (Regional Research 2001, TAC) noted that levels of risk are not measured objectively by individuals, but are subjective and influenced by a wide range of environmental, circumstantial and personal factors. In the earlier research the main factors that appeared to moderate risk taking behaviours were a combination of perceptions around the likelihood of getting caught and the severity of the consequences of taking the risk, coupled with perceptions of their own driving skills and sense of responsibility to oneself and others. This was the same among the respondents in this study – it was evident that risky driving behaviour was informed by considerations as to how risky something is (what are the chances of something 'happening' by taking this risk) and what will be the likely consequences of that 'happening'. Nonetheless, this is not to say that risky driving was always an active and considered decision; often it was not (as discussed in Section 5.2).

Respondents were encouraged to discuss the extent to which they considered the consequences of risky driving and the extent to which this influenced their behaviour. More often than not, respondents had not fully considered the consequences of their risky driving other than the likelihood of getting caught.

Interestingly, although during the discussions the primary concern related to risky driving was related to being caught and the associated implications of that (fines, points, loss of licence), the survey data revealed a slightly different concern – that of hurting or killing someone. This question was specifically about driving above the legal BAC limit, and was hypothetical; nevertheless it does reveal that harm to others was the main concern for two out of five participants, followed by getting stopped by the police and being fined and/or losing one's licence (Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1 Worries about drink-driving**



n = 92

In the focus groups, when they did consider possible consequences related to accidents or crashing, these tended to be triggered by an event such as ‘near-miss’ or hearing about someone else who had had an accident. Often, these kinds of reflections were discussed in the female groups.

*Yeah like if I am texting and I get distracted or whatever and I swerve a little bit, that kind of usually puts me off (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

In two of the female groups respondents reflected on the risks they had taken at some point, and feeling foolish for putting themselves and others at risk.

*Not really [worried about crashing] at the time, but afterwards I think ‘you’re an idiot’ (Group 12 older females Buninyong)*

*That’s dangerous, absolutely dangerous [caught speeding at 140km), I was putting all my friends in the car’s lives at risk, like, when I really thought about it I was just like I’m so stupid, I felt like the biggest douche bag (Group 9 young females, Buninyong)*

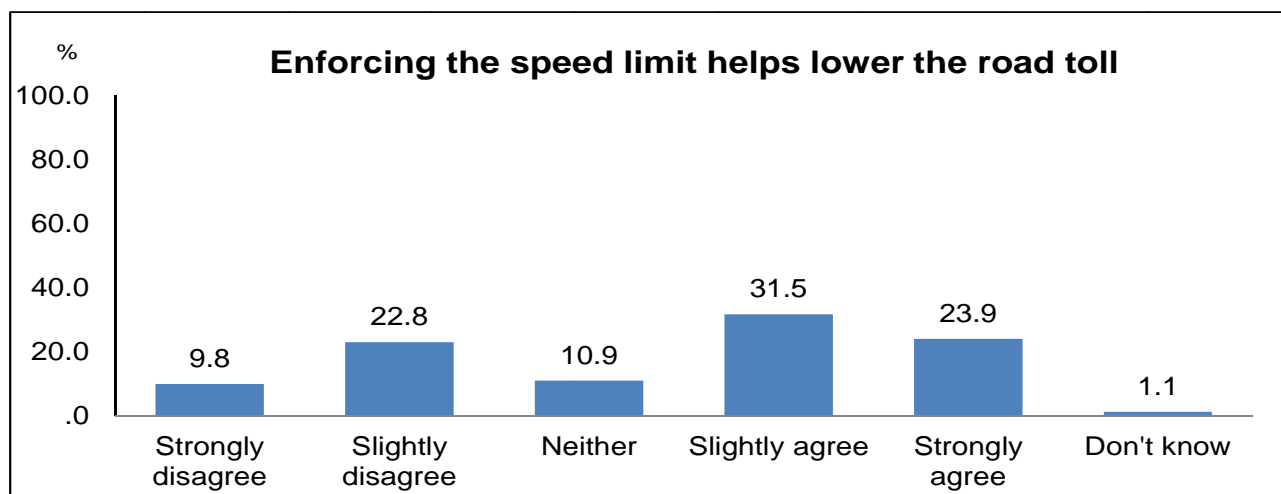
Respondents’ articulation of the risks they took (or used to take), how these were rationalised or justified and the steps or actions that were involved to minimise the potential consequences of those risks, were often muddled and contradictory. Respondents were often quick to judge what they perceived as risky driving behaviour of others, but were able to rationalise their own driving behaviour so that it seemed more acceptable (both to them and to others). A summary of this rationalisation and minimisation process is outlined in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1 Risk – rationalising behaviour and minimising consequences**

Risky driving behaviour	Rationale	Minimising likelihood and consequences
<b>Speeding (&lt; 30k above limit)</b>	Know the roads well Running late Everyone does it To see if get caught! Subconscious – speed creeps up Safe to drive faster	Stick to no more than 25-30 over Thinking about potential damage to car (and repair costs) Payment plan Drive old slow car Skilled driver
<b>Speed (30k+ above limit)</b>	For fun High performance car	Only where no-one else around/in the middle of nowhere Stick to known roads Drive alone
<b>Drink-driving</b>	No other way home Subconscious/unplanned A good driver/in control	Only every now and then Drive alone
<b>Drug-driving</b>	Nominated driver Stay awake after late night/work	Don't drink Stick to 'uppers'
<b>Using mobile</b>	Only time to make phone calls when busy	On roads where no police presence
<b>Driving while licence suspended</b>	Need to get to and from work/school etc. Public transport not available at the times/locations needed Almost time to get licence back	Stay on familiar roads Don't drink, speed etc. – be fully compliant Stick to short familiar routes Drive someone else's car
<b>No seatbelt</b>	Not habitual Uncomfortable (women)	Prompted by passengers Wear it under arm

This link between risk and consequences is evident in the example provided in Figure 6.2 below, which shows that the perceived association between speeding and the road toll was negligible among some. Data from the self-completion survey shows that although over half of respondents do believe that speed limit enforcements help to lower the road toll, around a third do not. Women were much more likely to strongly agree that speed limit enforcement helps reduce the road toll, whereas men were much more likely to disagree (there were no significant differences between the two age groups).

**Figure 6.2 Speed enforcement and the toll**



n = 92

## 6.2. Personal responsibility

Personal responsibility relates to the willingness and ability to accept the responsibility for one's own actions, and the potential consequences of those actions. In this research (as in previous research) a sense of personal responsibility for risky driving was relatively low for most respondents. Whilst there was sometimes *discussion* of personal responsibility, this did not often appear to be borne out in people's *behaviour*. So for example whilst there was discussion about how speeding could put oneself and others in danger, most respondents still admitted they drove above the speed limit on regular occasions (and often felt that it was relatively unlikely that they would get caught). Life stage appeared to have some influence here; certainly those with children and related responsibilities perhaps took greater responsibility for their actions than others (see Section 6.4.1 for further discussion on the effects of life stage on behaviour).

Furthermore, where people had passengers in the car, this did affect their sense of responsibility towards them and their risk taking would be tempered.

*You're responsible for their life essentially, as soon as they hop in the car (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*I think we all have a responsibility and I do think about it, like you don't want to be responsible for somebody else getting hurt (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

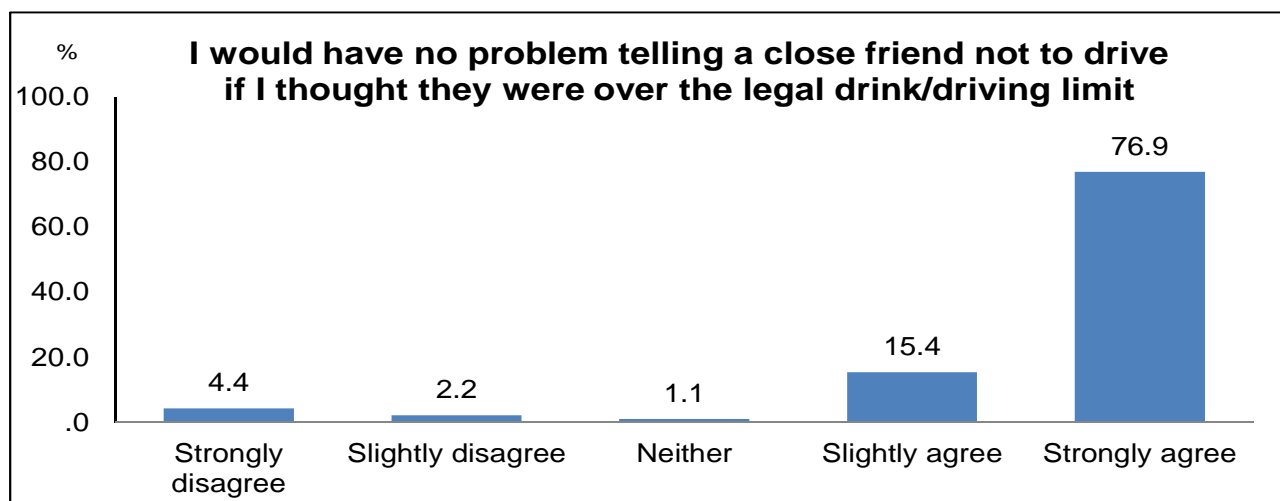


For many, driving alone appeared to provide an authority to take risks, with an assumption that one was only putting oneself at risk (and hence only had oneself to blame if something went wrong). There was only one instance across all of the groups where specific mention was made that even taking risks driving alone also affected other people should something happen.

*But it comes down to when you do hurt yourself, and you go to hospital, then it's someone else's problem as well. Cos then it's taking everyone else's time (Group 11 young males Buningyong)*

In the self-completion survey, respondents were asked questions about their sense of responsibility related to others' risk taking behaviour; in other words, the extent to which they might intervene or condemn a behaviour if they felt that a friend was taking risks in their driving. Almost all participants agreed that if they thought a close friend was over the BAC limit, they would have no problem in telling them not to drive (and three-quarters strongly agreed) – see Figure 6.3 – this was also evident in the group discussions.

**Figure 6.3 Attitudes to others' risk taking behaviours**

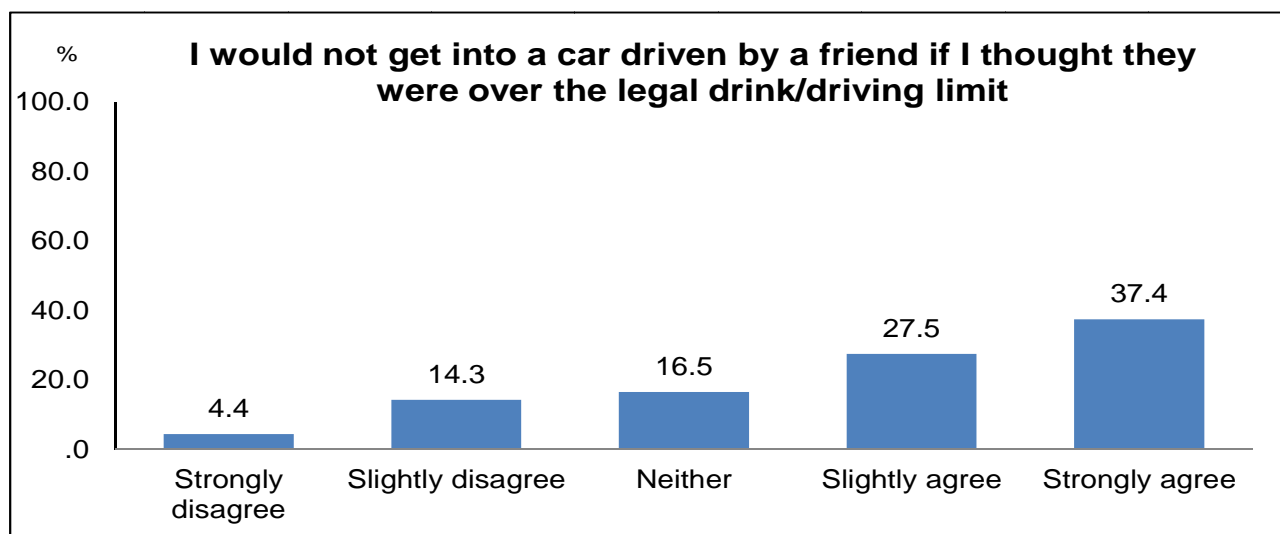


*n* = 92

Despite this, however, around a third strongly agreed that they would not get into a car knowing the driver was over the legal limit. About another third indicated that they slightly agreed that they would not be a passenger in such circumstances so the remainder were either ambivalent or indicated that perhaps they would (Figure 6.4). This apparent contradictory information suggests that whilst they are happy to suggest that a friend does not drive because they are over the limit, some of them are also happy to be driven by someone who is over the BAC limit. It may also be explained by discussions relating to being a 'safe' driver even if they are over the legal BAC limit. As discussed in section 5.3, the extent to which individuals had a problem with others taking risks (and feeling a consequent need to object) depended on a number of situational factors that were taken into account when assessing risk. Simply being over the legal BAC limit did not often correlate with danger.



**Figure 6.4 Being a passenger with a driver over the BAC limit**

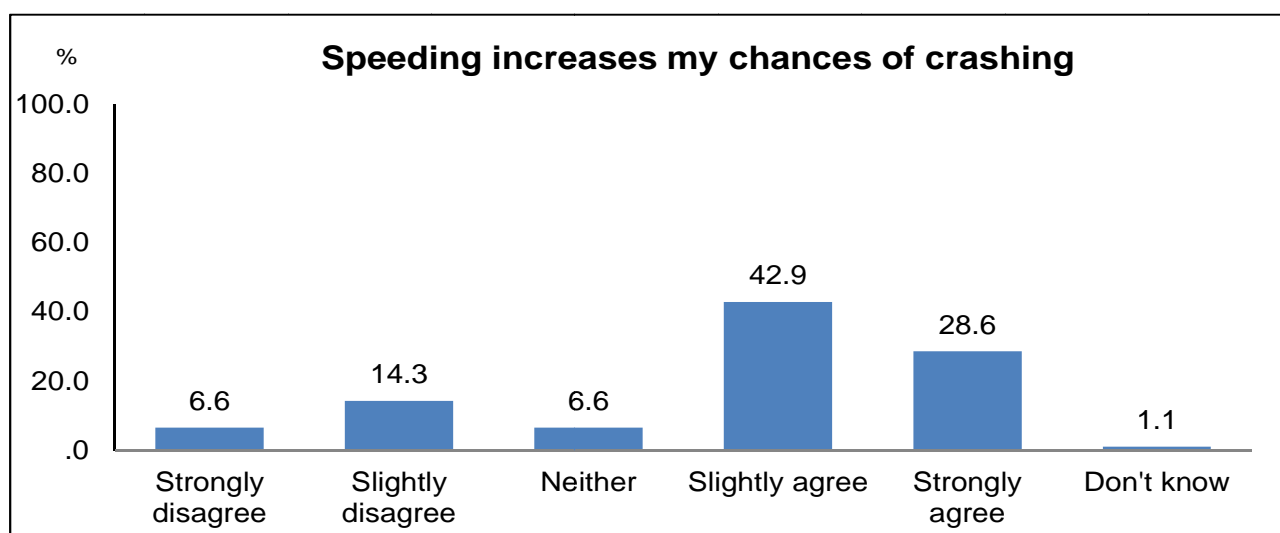


n = 92

**6.3. Acceptance of risk in driving**

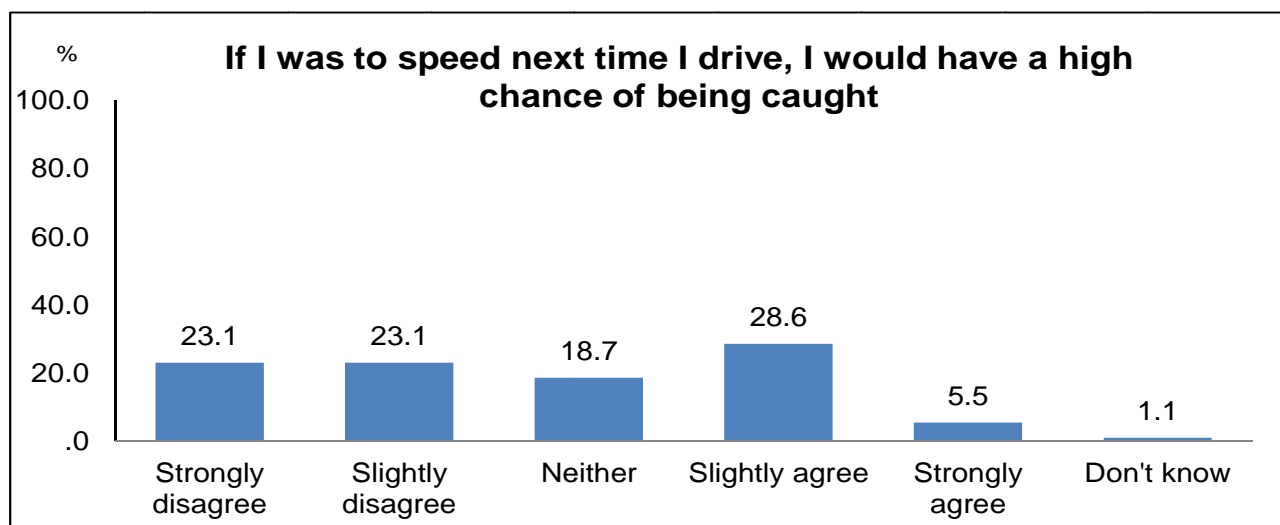
One in seven of respondents thought that speeding did increase their chances of crashing (see Figure 6.5) – although most slightly agreed rather than strongly agreed. However, this tentative connection between speeding and crashing was generally an insufficient reason for them not to speed – particularly given the belief that they had a relatively low chance of being caught for speeding (see Figure 6.6).

**Figure 6.5 Association with speeding and increased chance of crashing**



n = 92

**Figure 6.6 Perceived chance of being caught speeding**



n = 92

#### 6.4. Moderating risky behaviour

More often than not in the groups, respondents spoke about certain driving behaviours that they used to do but no longer did, or that they only do in certain situations (mostly, excessive speeding and drink driving). A range of factors or circumstances influenced this change in behaviour, and these are discussed in turn. As such, these can be viewed as factors that have moderated (or have the potential to moderate) risky driving behaviour.

##### 6.4.1. Changes in life stage or circumstances

As has been found in previous research, life stage appeared to be a major determinant of risky driving behaviours. Unsurprisingly, many of the older age group (25-34 year olds) had secure jobs, families and their own homes. For most, these circumstances were said to have tempered their driving behaviour. There were several reasons for this, including:

- **Having more family responsibilities** - this included having a partner and/or children. Respondents typically said that when their family was in the car, they drove slower and took less risks, generally feeling more responsible for others.

*90% of the time they're in the car with me so I won't speed or overtake. So maybe not just going in the overtaking line with my kids or wife in the car (Group 10, older males, Buninyong)*

- **Having more financial responsibilities** - the potential impact of a large fine on family circumstances was also said to be a reason for slowing down or not taking so many risks in driving as when they were younger. Some respondents – notably males – spoke of receiving of significant fines in the past and did not relish the thought of having to pay these again, particularly where they had mortgages and children to pay for.

- **A general maturity**, which in itself meant that they became more risk averse and perhaps a greater awareness of the fragility of life. The females in the groups often discussed a greater awareness of the risks (in terms of having an accident) whereas for males the discussion was often around becoming a more experienced driver, and for some, a gradual realisation that they were not 'invincible'. Some reflected back on how they used to drive, and how lucky they were not to have had a serious accident.

*....whereas when you are a teenager you don't know what on earth you're doing (Group 3, older females, Gembrook)*

*I used to be the biggest dickhead on the road ...and now I see these dickheads on P-plates... I just think "you f-ing w\*nkers; you're going to kill yourselves, you don't know how to drive" (Group 6 older males, Broadford)*

*I think now I'm more aware of how other people drive and how they generally act, and how I'm going to react to it if they do something wrong, now that I'm older. I don't take risks anymore because my job's important and things are more important ... more responsibility (Group 2, older males, Gembrook)*

*I was very lucky that I didn't kill anyone (Group 12, older females, Buninyong)*

#### **6.4.2. Driving alone or with others**

In both female and male groups, it was evident that as drivers they took more risks when they drove alone than when they had passengers in the car; in these cases they were more 'cautious'. There were examples given of risk-taking that respondents still did (notably speeding or hazardous over-taking) alone but would not do with others in the car.

*... I don't do it [driving at an excessive speed] if someone else is with me... because if I hit it and I'm by myself it's my own dumb fault I've hurt meself (Group 11 young males Buninyong)*

*I drive a lot faster if I'm just by myself (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*I will drive a lot slower [with passengers] because if I make a mistake it's not just my life on the line, it's someone else's (Group 3 older females Gembrook)*

For almost all respondents, this moderation of behaviour was explained through feeling a level of responsibility for their passengers and not wanting to feel the guilt or shame should their passengers be harmed in any way because of their own actions. A few of the males said that if they did specifically take risks such as drink driving or speeding, they would not 'let' anyone come with them. Interestingly, concerns over fellow passengers rarely extended to occupants of other vehicles on the roads,

despite also potentially at risk from their own risky driving behaviour (which most admitted to when driving alone).

*Oh [when I'm driving alone] I might corner a bit quickly, might take off quickly, might overtake people, that sort of thing, but if they're in the car [I] sit on the speed limit, do the right thing, watch out for everyone else (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*I know myself I'll do a lot more, I don't know, what you call 'dangerous' or 'risky' driving if I'm on my own (Group 7 young males, Broadford)*

#### **6.4.3. Previous accidents**

There was much discussion during the groups about people's previous experience of accidents or near misses – almost all could recount examples of where they had been involved in crashes, some of them serious. In the main, these experiences had impacted on their driving behaviour, making them more cautious or careful – without such events many said they would have carried on as they had been.

*Until you get personally affected, you're not gonna stop cause you think "oh it's not gonna happen to me" (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

For the females, most personal examples related to accidents they had been involved in which they perceived were not their fault. Many of the women described a degree of cautiousness as a result of this.

*Well I've had two minor accidents and now that made me more cautious of other cars and especially learner drivers (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

The males were more likely to talk about the accidents they had been involved in which were their fault or where they had made mistakes; often these had occurred when they were driving alone.

*Yeah I was sort of drowsy and I nodded off and sort of swerved off the road just coming into x and hit a tree (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

*I suppose you grow up thinking you're invincible.... You realise after mistakes that you're not (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

#### **6.4.4. Accumulation of points, loss of licence and fines**

In all of the groups, mention was made of the accumulation of points and the resultant loss of licence. Many respondents had lost their licence at some point and often this was as a result of the accumulation of points for numerous offences although for some it was a direct result of an offence such as excessive speeding, drink-driving or driving whilst already suspended. There was a significant 'fear' about losing their driving licence, although this was concentrated among those who had been through this experience and realised the significant inconvenience this brought.

*So I was walking for 12 months, which unfortunately sucks but the penalties do work (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

*Loss of licence. I did it for six months and never want to do it again, not out here where there's virtually no public transport, no buses, no anything and my parents don't like to drive me anywhere (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

Some respondents – notably males – had spent a relatively large amount of their early driving years with a suspended licence (in one particular example, the respondent had lost his provisional licence on the day he received it).

*I used to go out all the time, do skids and do whatever, but now you sort of mature a bit and you get over it, but now, like, I still don't get my full licence until I'm 28 (Group 4 young males Gembrook)*

Many respondents talked about being close to losing their licence and having to ensure they did not accumulate any further points within 12 months (which would automatically result in licence suspension). This often moderated their driving behaviour.

*I had to be cautious with absolutely everything I do because no matter what I do if it involves losing points I can lose it [licence] straight away so if I go through a red light and get caught then I'm done... my licence is gone for six months .... So I'm like 10 times more cautious on the roads (Group 9 young females Buninyong)*

Others discussed keeping their driving speed to no more than 30 kilometres per hour over the speed limit, recognising that exceeding this would automatically involve a licence suspension.

*It's funny how you assess it while you're driving 'cause you sit there and think 'well okay I'm doing 125 but I'm under 30 [over the speed limit] so if I get caught I won't lose my licence (Group 10 older males Buninyong)*

Respondents were also deterred by fines – although perhaps a lesser degree than points and loss of licence. However, the fines were seen as high enough to make a significant impact on subsequent behaviour – again this appeared to be more of a deterrent to those who had already had to pay fines.

*I got a speeding fine and I think since then I've hardly sped at all just because it was \$300 dollars (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

#### **6.4.5. Awareness of others' accidents**

As well as having personally been in an accident, many had family or friends who had also been in accidents, some of them severe or involving fatalities. Where it was related to an accident involving someone such as a peer or other known local, particularly if there had been a fatality, there was some discussion (occurring in both a young female and young male group) of the diminishing impact over time. Whilst

there was initial shock in the community, several commented that after a while people returned to their 'normal' driving behaviour. This appeared to be particularly so among the younger groups.

*Straight away it would (make you think) but then it's kind of like you just, not forget about them, but ... it, like, wears off (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*I think it's also more you've also learnt. Like you've either had someone that's had an accident or you've experienced that or you've seen someone that's experienced a loss and you are more aware*

There were also mentions of the roadside crosses and memorials, which also had an impact on some (this appeared to be more likely to be mentioned by females than males)

*I find the memorials people put up on the side of the road are more effective in teaching me to go slower around that corner (Group 3 older females Gembrook)*

There was a notable difference in attitudes and the 'seriousness' of discussions in the focus groups about road accidents, fatalities and mortality generally; males tended to discuss this more pragmatically than their female counterparts who were more emotive during their recalls of accidents that had injured or claimed the lives of others.

#### **6.4.6. Type of vehicle driven**

The number of respondents within the groups who had high performance cars or cars with modifications was notable and as noted earlier in this report many respondents had a clear interest in cars and driving. That said, comments were made about why it was possible to purchase cars that had such high top kilometres per hour, and that that in itself encouraged people to drive at excessive speeds.

*Why do we sell cars in Australia with speedos that go to 220...what's the point of that? ... where 100ks is the freeway limit... you give that thing to a kid, it's a challenge, that's a challenge (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*There's too many high-powered cars out there... young people are getting into (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

Some respondents, notably females with children, had upgraded their cars to newer larger vehicles with more safety features, with the view that this would offer them (and their families) maximum protection.

*I've got a brand new Kluger 'cause I was pregnant and I said I wanted everything, all the curtains everything and that sort of stuff so when I drive it I'm indestructible (Group 3 older females Gembrook)*

However, it was noted by others that driving newer safer cars could in fact lead respondents to taking more risks, with the assumption that they had greater protection than if they were in an older car, where they may be more reliant on their driving skills rather than assistance such as traction control.

*ABS has saved my life so many times (Group 3 older females Gembrook)*

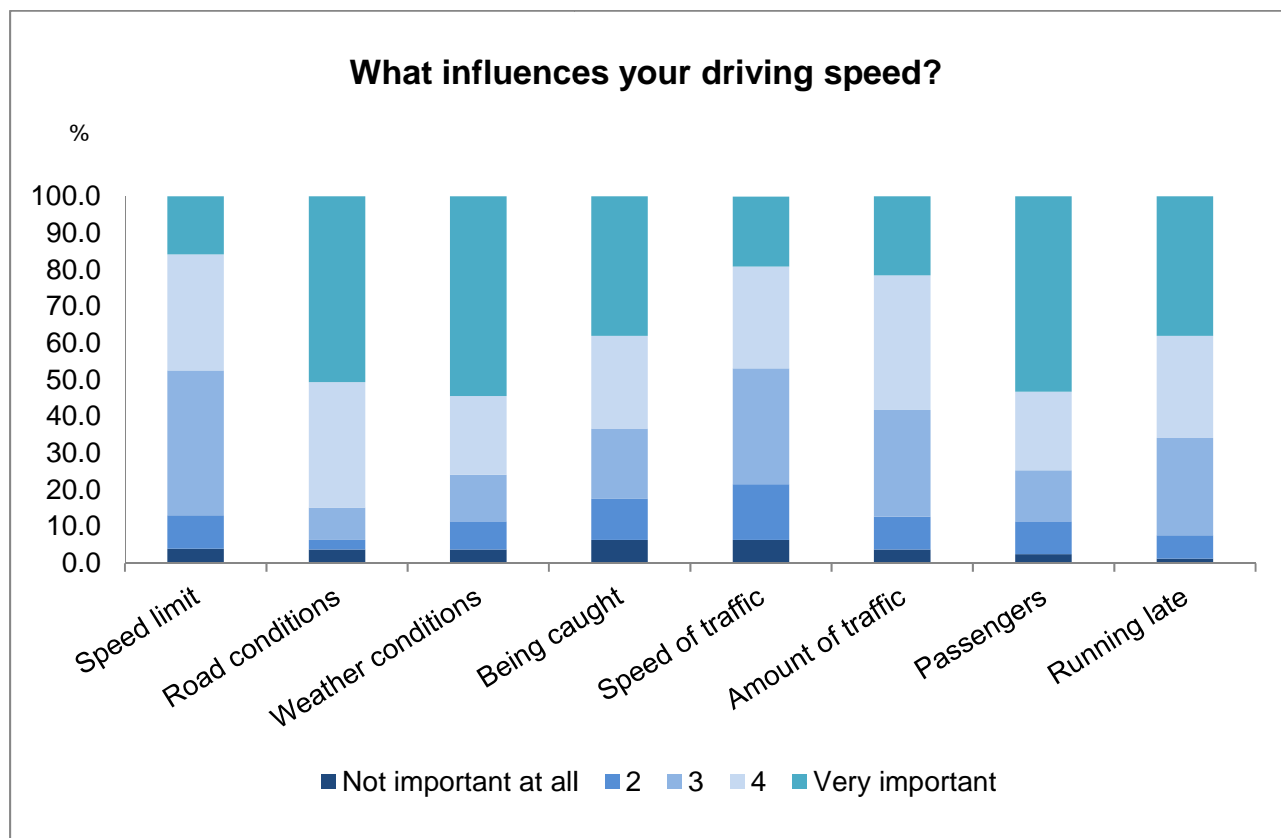
### 6.5. Individual responses to moderating behaviour

Within the self-completion survey, questions were asked about what influences behaviour in relation to a number of different types of risk driving.

#### 6.5.1. Influences on driving speed

According to individual survey responses, the most influential factors on how fast or slow individuals drove were weather conditions, road conditions and whether there were passengers in the car (Figure 6.7), with over half of respondents indicating that this was 'very important'. Conversely, the speed of other traffic, chances of being caught and the speed limit were the least important influences on driving speed. There were some gender and age differences – for example older female respondents were more likely to be influenced by whether or not there were passengers in the car – although these differences should be viewed with caution due to the small sample size.

**Figure 6.7 Influences on driving speed**



n = 92



## **6.6. Perceived need to moderate behaviour**

In the main, respondents indicated that they had moderated their behaviour from when they first started driving, but most did not discuss the need to moderate their behaviour currently or in the future. Whilst they were able to talk at length about how they had taken perhaps unacceptable or foolish risks in the past, their risk-taking in driving nowadays was often prefixed with a justification or perceived legitimate reason.

*... at the time I didn't realise how dangerous it was [hooning] and the risk that everyone was taking in that regard. It's stupid (Group 5 young females Broadford)*



## 7. Reducing risk taking behaviour - what do risky drivers suggest?

This section of the report focuses on what respondents themselves suggested should be done to encourage them, or others like them, to take fewer risks when driving, and to drive more safely. This was in response to an open question in the groups as to what it would make them take fewer risks as drivers. This was an interesting concept to discuss in the groups, as most made the suggestions relative to others rather than themselves – as noted elsewhere in this report, there was an evident disconnect between risk-taking behaviour and personal responsibility. Whilst all respondents disclosed different degrees of risky driving (which was of course a screening requirement for recruitment), strategies to reduce risky driving were commonly directed at others.

### 7.1. Greater enforcement

Interestingly, in all of the focus groups it was suggested that there should be a greater enforcement of the law, and harsher penalties. Whilst not all respondents were in agreement (presumably not wanting to be personally affected by greater enforcement), it was clear that people's risk-taking driving behaviour was significantly tempered by the likelihood of getting caught and the severity of the consequences. As noted earlier, both fines and potential licence suspension were significant deterrents, particularly among those who had already experienced this.

A greater and less predictable police presence would, it was reported, help in making people to behave more responsibility. However, despite this it was only tentatively suggested by some (with others in the groups sometimes quick to discourage this).

*Well it's not that I'm saying I would want more cops around. Yeah I don't want more cops round here but it would probably work (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*Catch us more, they've gotta be more effective, the fact that we know we can drink-drive every weekend and be fine (Group 4 young males Gembrook)*

In a few groups, specific mention was made of truck drivers and a perception that they drove dangerously, sometimes under the influence of drugs (this was confirmed a couple of times by respondents who were, or had been, truck drivers; the use of amphetamines or stimulants were said to be common practice among some to ensure that they did not fall asleep on long night journeys).

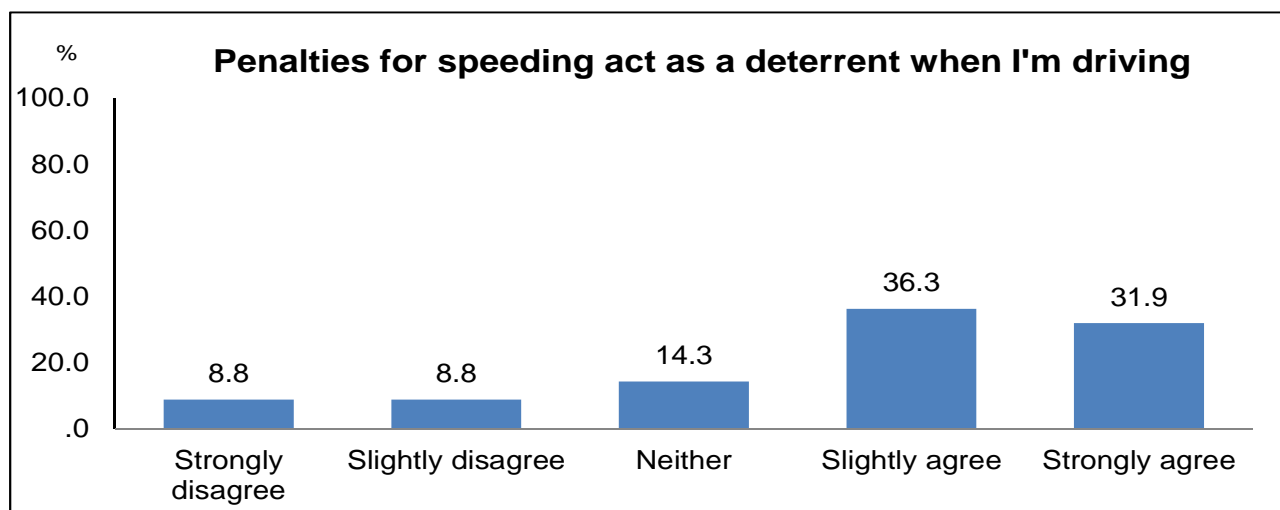
*... every weighbridge should be 24 hour drug testing, mandatory for truck drivers. Because, like, working on the freeway and the nightshift.... (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

It would appear that there are some gender differences in suggestions for moderating risky driver behaviour, with the female respondents perhaps more supportive of deterrent activity (harsher enforcement) but males more likely to also discuss prevention strategies such as greater emphasis on defensive driving skills and providing safe non-public areas to drive. Males also discussed the feasibility of rewarding good driving behaviour (or even designated driver rewards)

*Do we get rewarded for being a good driver instead of being punished for being a bad driver?...like you might get 10% off your licence renewal if you hadn't had a fine in three years, which is like 5 bucks or something (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

When asked in the self-completion questionnaire about whether penalties for speeding act as a deterrent *for them personally*, less than a third strongly agreed and a further third slightly agreed, meaning that for the remaining third they were either ambivalent or disagreed that speeding penalties were a deterrent for them (see Figure 7.1).

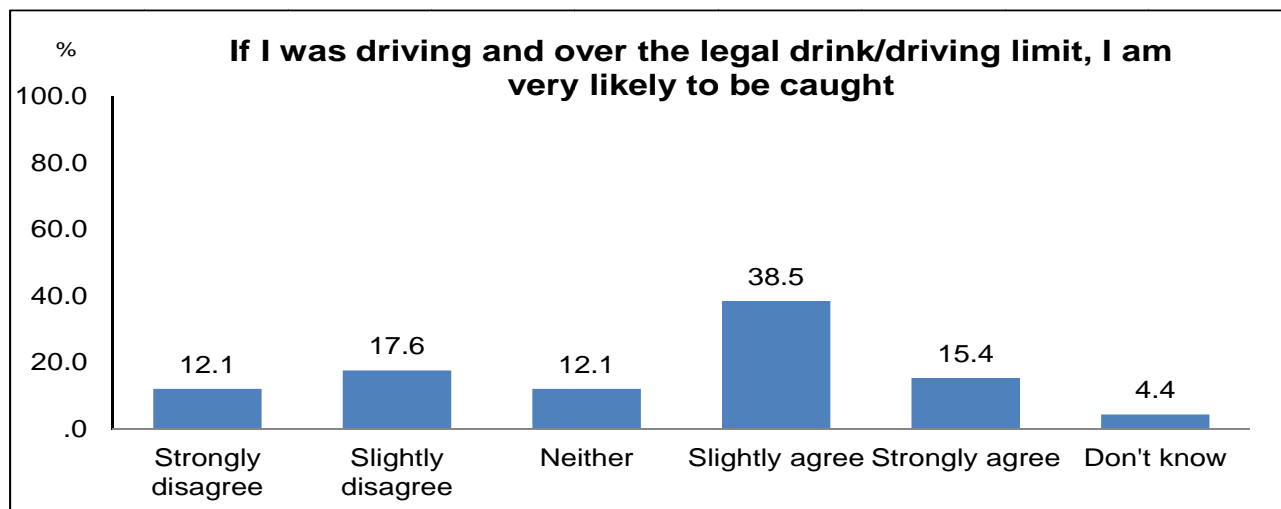
**Figure 7.1 The deterrent effect of penalties for speeding**



*n* = 92

This relates to respondents' views that their chances of being caught speeding are not high (see Figure 6.6). Respondents also believed that their chances of getting caught over the drink driving limit was not that high (Figure 7.2).

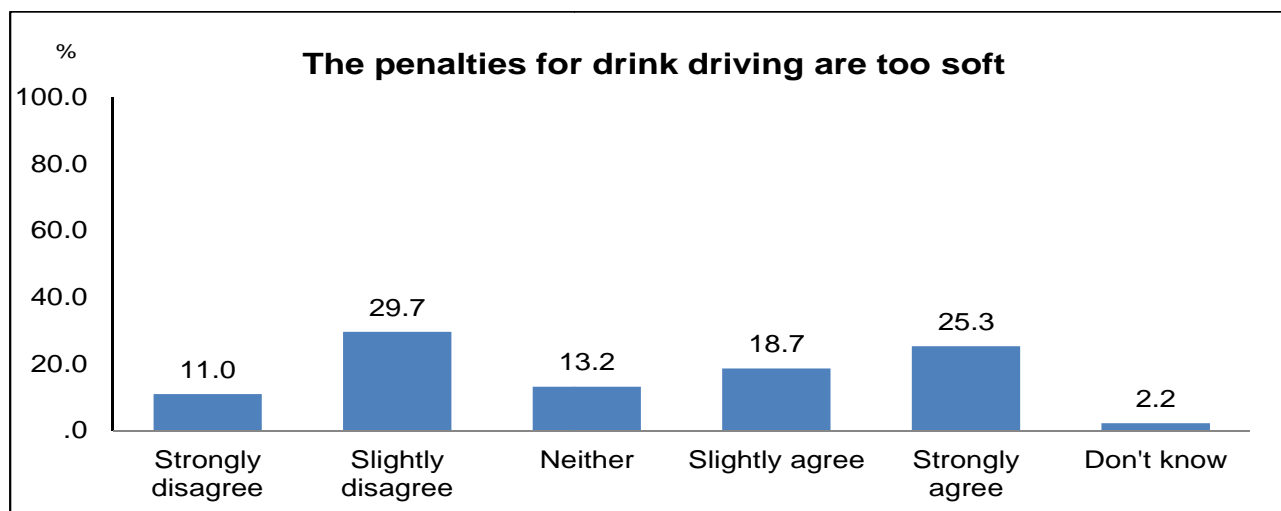
**Figure 7.2 Chances of being caught drink/driving**



n = 92

As noted earlier, many respondents said that they had driven over the BAC limit (some on many occasions) – for others this was justified by it being only slightly over the limit and they felt ‘fine’ to drive. Respondents were fairly evenly split between those who thought the penalties for drink/driving were too soft and those who did not (Figure 7.3).

**Figure 7.3 Drink driving penalties**



n = 92

**7.2. Education and training**

As noted earlier in the report in several of the groups (young females, older males) it was suggested that younger people should be encouraged to go on a defensive driving course. Respondents also thought that more could be done to help drivers know their ‘personal limits’ in terms of their own driving ability, and adjusting driving behaviour for different road or weather conditions.

### **7.3. Rewarding 'good' driving**

In two focus groups (older females, younger males), it was suggested that there could be some kind of reward for good driving or maintaining a points-free licence. In another group it was also suggested that nominated drivers could also be rewarded, although there were no suggestions as to how this could be done.

## 8. Awareness of the Talk the Toll Down campaign

The TAC has recently supported local media campaigns to encourage communities to raise awareness of the road toll and to discuss issues to reduce it. In order to measure awareness of this Talk the Toll Down initiative, participants in all groups were shown A3 colour copies of local newspaper pages featuring images and articles from the Talk The Toll Down (TTTD) campaign.

Participants were asked if they recognised the 'Talk The Toll Down' campaign, if they knew anything about it, if they were likely to read regional papers, and if so, if they were likely to take note of something like TTTD in such publications. Discussion also touched on the best possible ways of getting such messages out to participants and their peers, as well as whether or not participants ever discussed issues to do with road safety with their friends and family, and if so, what prompted these conversations and what they were generally about.

### 8.1. Familiarity

Across all groups, no participants claimed to be familiar with the Talk The Toll Down campaign. Neither the concept, name, logo nor content were recalled; some mentioned familiarity with other TAC-related campaigns instead, such as the Touched By The Road Toll bumper stickers, and TAC billboards and television commercials.

### 8.2. Communication methods

Participants were shown copied pages from The Ballarat Courier (Buninyong), The Pakenham Gazette (Gembrook), and The Seymour Telegraph (Broadford). Generally, in all three regions, participants were unlikely to have habitually read these publications. According to most, these papers were flicked through if come across in waiting rooms, at the post office, or on lunch breaks. In Gembrook in particular, participants explained that many residents did not have personal mailboxes and so were unlikely to receive and read local papers such as the Pakenham Gazette (or the equivalent in Gembrook). It was also mentioned in Broadford that the Seymour Telegraph was not free, and that most people would be more likely to read the Review, which was delivered at no cost.

Most participants explained that they would probably not read an article about road safety or the road toll, and would more likely skim past it. However, if there was an article about a local fatality, serious accident, or police blitz they would perhaps be more likely to take notice. One participant mentioned that road toll-related news was depressing, and not something they would spend their time looking at. Another explained that because there were so many reports of local road accidents and fatalities, she tended to glance at the pictures and skim over the stories rather than taking notice of what was written. A small group of participants claimed that local road toll and road safety related articles interested them and they would take the time to read them, but only if it was related to their local area.

*I always just think 'there's stories about another family member that's been lost by somebody in Pakenham', and I know that sounds awful because it's not that I don't want to read about them but it's just that there are a lot of them. So when you see something like that you don't read the – you know, you look at the pictures. (Group 3 older females Gembrook)*

*As far as reading the paper, I would probably slip right past that. I wouldn't be interested in reading about that. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*If it's local I would read it*

*- Yeah if it was related to our area then I would read it. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

It was asserted by a few that if the target audience of the TTTD campaign was young people like themselves, then having it feature in local papers such as the ones shown was an ineffective way of communicating the message. When asked what methods of communication would better connect with participants and their peers, most responded that social media such as Facebook would be more effective in reaching them. Other suggestions included having TTTD promotion in the local pubs, and for younger people, having it feature in schools, on television, or in youth-oriented publications like Beat magazine. It was mentioned by a few women in Broadford that it would be useful to promote such campaigns on emergency services websites and Facebook pages; the Country Fire Authority and State Emergency Service websites and Facebook pages were visited by several participants (and apparently, many others living in regional areas) to check reported accidents, fire warnings, etc. in their local area.

*I would call that really bad advertising because if you're trying to attract or get to the younger generation you don't go through a local newspaper. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

*You'd probably have to hit social media for us to pay attention. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*I think TV or radio would be much better. (Group 5 young females Broadford)*

*The Herald Sun. You read the Sun every morning – smoko*

*Moderator: But you're in town. Does everyone read the Herald Sun?*

*- Yeah. (Group 6 older males Broadford)*

*CFA and SES and things like that because on Facebook I'm on the CFA page and that comes up with accidents and fires and warnings and stuff like that so you know people check the CFA website, especially in summer for bushfires. (Group 8 older females Broadford)*

### **8.3. Road safety as a topic of conversation**

Generally, according to respondents road safety was not a frequent topic of conversation for amongst them, their families and friends. It was reported that they would generally only speak with others about driving related issues if there had been a local incident on the roads, or if they or someone they knew had been in an accident. Nevertheless, some older participants explained that when they saw reports of serious accidents and/or fatalities on the roads, they did think about it more so than when they were younger.

*Only when something bad happens. (Group 1 young females Gembrook)*

*Oh for sure like if you know you see the Herald Sun with a car ripped in two and you automatically look at it and go speed was a factor or they've mentioned that alcohol was in the car or alcohol was involved, you often look at it and think geez you know, I look at it and think lucky it's not me. (Group 2 older males Gembrook)*

Some participants (all males) explained that they had sometimes discussed their driving with friends as a way of showing off, or bragging about their hooning behaviour. Additionally, many participants had engaged in conversations about police presence on the roads as a way of minimising their chances of getting caught breaking the law whilst driving (e.g. taking a back road when over the 0.05 limit after having been warned by someone that there was a booze bus elsewhere).

*Talk to friends about road safety and driving - only to boast about the things they had done. (Group 7 young males Broadford)*

## 9. Conclusions

This research was commissioned to help the Transport Accident Commission to build on its understanding of road safety in regional Victoria, and in particular understanding of attitudes, behaviour and perceptions around road safety among 'risky' drivers in the selected regional locations around the shires of Cardinia, Mitchell, and Ballarat/Golden Plains. As previous research has found, unsurprisingly, people's views and behaviour varied by life stage and gender. However, whilst age and gender and perhaps personality go some way to explaining risky driving behaviours there are other factors at play including education, misinformation, low levels of personal responsibility, driving skills and a lack of serious consideration or acknowledgement of the potential negative impacts of risky driving (over and above financial penalties and loss of licence).

Assessment of risk – where consciously made – was generally associated with the likelihood of being 'caught' rather than any objective measure related to likelihood of harm, particularly in relation to oneself. Whilst few respondents, if any, said they would put others at risk of harm through risky driving, in the main most did not place the same value on their own safety. In part, this was related to their own assessment of their (apparently good) driving ability but this was also related to a more general attitude to driving alone (particularly in quiet times of the day or in quiet rural areas), which was often seen as an opportunity to take more risks –especially if there was a perception that they were unlikely to be caught.

The research also found that people were often paradoxical in their discussions – they were often seemingly contradictory, quick to condone or judge behaviours of others that were seen as risky but later disclosing similar behaviours, actions or attitudes.

There was also an underlying assumption (overtly articulated by some) that '*everyone takes risks*' in driving, and that certain risky or illegal driving behaviour is the norm for the vast majority. Whether this is a reflection of the context or environment of the research, or the fact that they were recruited as 'risky drivers' is not clear. However, what was surprising is that when looking at the individual the composition of the focus groups it is clear that a wide range of respondents was covered, representing different household or family types, different educational levels and different economic activities. Thus, these risky drivers were not drawn from the same groups, or same types of people but reflected a wide range of population groups within the regional areas covered.



With these issues in mind, the following were identified in addressing risky driving among these groups:

- **Failure to recognise the role of penalties in deterring risky driving.** Penalties (points) were said to be strong deterrents to speeding, especially when the accumulation of these was close to the point of licence suspension. However, despite this worry, many respondents still took risks but were more cautious where and when they did it. In other words, if respondents thought that they might be able to 'get away with it' (which they commonly did) they would do it. There was never an acknowledgement among respondents that the purpose of penalties (particularly for speeding) was to encourage people to drive at a safe speed, in order to minimise the risk of harm to themselves or others. Penalties often tended to be seen more as an annoyance or an inconvenience rather than a safety issue.
- **Responsibility for self.** Respondents clearly did not feel the same level of responsibility for themselves when driving than when they had others in the car, taking more risks when driving alone and assuming that if something happened it would in all likelihood be someone else's fault (i.e., another road user) and that the only person affected would be themselves.
- **Perceived lack of choice in taking some risks.** Respondents often discussed not having a choice with certain risky driving. A typical example here relates to road quality. Respondents talked about the danger in having to swerve to avoid potholes or the need to overtake slower moving vehicles. However other examples included having to talk on the mobile phone (nowhere to pull over, the only free time to make work calls etc).
- **Hazard perception.** Related to the above, among some there appeared to be a limited understanding of hazard perception with a tendency to place blame on the hazards (animals, weather, other drivers, poor lighting etc) rather than adjusting driving behaviour in potentially hazardous situations.
- **Aggressive driving.** Some respondents – both males and females – described a frustration with some drivers which could result in risky behaviours such as tailgating. However, this was not necessarily seen as risky, and (as with other risky driving behaviours) was often perceived as excusable or understandable.
- **Driving skills.** The overwhelming majority of respondents felt that they were better drivers than the average (only one respondent felt that they were a slightly worse driver than the average). This perception, coupled with a relatively low level of personal responsibility for oneself (when driving alone) is a potentially dangerous combination.
- **Normalising risky driving.** For many in this group, receiving points, fines and – in some cases, loss of licence was seen as fairly typical or normal. Whilst a few spoke of the stigma and embarrassment of losing one's licence (particularly if it had happened on more than one occasion), this was generally not the case for receiving points or fines.

- **Understanding different risk-taking typologies.** The findings from this research have identified different risk-taking 'rationales'. These models can be explored further during subsequent stages of this longitudinal project.
- **Early driving experiences.** Despite their relatively young age, many drivers spoke of how their driving had changed since they first started driving, and how they now realised that they were relatively inexperienced when they began and that their driving had improved since then. Further research to understand driver attitudes and behaviour with L-platers and early P-platers is suggested to assess their norms, attitudes and values around risky driving and the extent to which they relate to life stage or other exogenous factors.

## Appendix 1 Discussion Guide

## TAC Regional Qualitative Research Discussion Guide V1.2 (August 2012)

### **Overall Research Aim**

The overall aim is to explore attitudes, perspectives and behaviour in relation to driving and road safety among young people in regional Victoria.

### **Research Objectives**

- To understand the driving behaviour of participants and others in the local area generally.
- To explore key areas of road safety and risk-taking such as speeding, drink and drug driving, driving whilst tired, driving whilst distracted.
- To understand in more detail *why* drivers may take risks – moving on from the observational to the analytical
- To gain a greater insight into perceptions of risk and consequences and how and why these vary within and between groups
- To explore and identify acceptability and norms relating to risks among young drivers
- To explore the notion of personal responsibility and how these influence attitudes and behaviour
- To assess awareness of Talk the Toll Down campaign
- To gain insights that can be used to inform marketing and road safety strategies.

### **Explanation to participants**

- Introduce Group Moderator(s) and TAC observer (if applicable).
- Thank participants for their time and contribution. Confirm end time, explain 'house rules' (i.e., mobile phones on silent, refreshments, talking one at a time, confidentiality)
- Explain what the research is about - "*We're here to talk about issues to do with driving and road safety ....*".
- Explain recording, and client viewing and confidentiality of participant information. – "*With your permission we would like to record the group. The recording will only be used to help us with analysing the results. Your personal details are confidential, and we will not keep or pass on any personal information about you. Is it OK for us to record the group?*"
- Explain the importance of honest opinions – "*Your views and experience are important, so we would like you to tell us what you think and feel about your experiences and about each of the topics we talk about. It's not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. We would just like to hear your honest opinions. Also, as we are talking about your personal opinions and experiences, it is not necessary for everyone to agree with each other. It is helpful for us to find out the different opinions that people*

*have, as well as where people have the same opinions, so please feel free to tell us whatever you think and feel, even if it might be different to what other people in the room are saying. It is also important that you know that everything that we talk about today is treated with confidence, and we expect that you will also treat anything that you hear in the discussion with confidence, thanks."*

### **1. Introduction (5 minutes)**

*I'd like to start by asking a bit about yourself: your first name, where you live, who you live with and what age you were when you started driving.*

*Interviewer note: throughout the discussions ensure that identifying differences between different risky behaviours (e.g., drink/drug driving, speeding etc.).*

### **2. Driving and road safety in general (5 minutes)**

- 2.1 Can we start by talking about driving in this regional area of Victoria – what is it like? What are the positives and negatives?
- 2.2 What are the main road safety issues here?
- 2.3 How are these different to other areas (e.g., metropolitan, or other parts of Victoria)
- 2.4 What (or who) would you say causes the most road accidents around here?
- 2.5 Whose responsibility would you say it is, to keep our roads safe  
*Prompt: individuals, community, police, TAC, other?)*
- 2.6 How would you describe the local police enforcement in this area, when it comes to driving? *Explore for perceptions*

### **3. Risky driving (15 minutes)**

1. In your view, what is risky driving? What kinds of things are risky when it comes to driving safely? *Prompt for behavioural and environmental 'risks'*

*Behavioural/individual*

- Drink driving
- Driving fast/speeding
- Drug driving
- Driving whilst tired
- Not wearing seatbelt

*Environmental/external*

- Distractions (e.g., mobile, smart phone, others in the car etc.)
- Driving an 'unsafe' vehicle, older vehicle etc.
- Road conditions

- Adverse weather
- Rurality (wildlife etc.)
- Time of day/night, days of week, time of year
- Other drivers/other vehicles on the road

2. What are your views on these types of risky driving? Do you ever think about these kinds of risks? If so, which ones and why?

*Prompt on risks mentioned in the group, rather than going through each of the above systematically. Note any particular risks to return to in the bulletin board discussions.*

3. What is the difference between risky driving and dangerous driving (if any)?
4. Are there levels of acceptable and unacceptable risk-taking in driving terms?

*Prompt: What is acceptable or OK? What is unacceptable? Why? Can you give examples?*

5. Is this different in rural or regional areas compared to more metropolitan areas?
6. Does risk acceptability change, e.g., time of day, who's with you?
7. Are there some types of risky driving that are seen as 'the norm' for you/your peers?

*Prompt: explore norms for this group. Are there things that you used to see as the norm or OK to do but don't any more? If so, what and why? Prompt for recent examples.*

8. What about things like getting your driving licence suspended – how common are those kinds of things around here for your age group?
9. How do people react to this? Prompt for acceptability/inevitability, consequences (e.g., offering lifts to unlicensed, driving anyway, how are things like this viewed in the community?)

#### **4. Risks and consequences (10 minutes)**

*Opening statement - previous research has clearly shown a link between risk and consequences, where taking risks is closely linked to the likelihood of something happening as a result (i.e., getting caught or crashing), and how severe that might be.*

1. So thinking about the behaviours that we have just been discussing – what kinds of consequences are we talking about?

*Prompts:*

- Getting caught – fines and demerits, losing licence
- Injuring oneself or others
- Impact on others

- Impact on self

2. And which of these are the most influential on you?  
*Explore to see whether can establish a hierarchy – is the uppermost concern getting caught? Injuring oneself or others?*
3. What's the likelihood of these things happening? What are the chances of getting 'caught' if you do take these kinds of risks? *Probe to understand perceptions of police effectiveness locally in enforcing the law relating to driving.*

## 5. Moderating behaviour, risk reduction and deterrents (10 minutes)

*OK, we are just going to move on now to talk about accident prevention, and ways in which the severity of accidents can be reduced, particularly among your age group.*

1. So if we take risks as drivers, what can be done to moderate those risks (i.e., those discussed at 4.1)?  
*Probe: do respondents think that there is there a need to moderate risky behaviour – either theirs or other people's?*
2. What about things such as the type of car and its safety features?  
*Use example if needed: say for example a car drifts off road on a slight right hand bend in 100k/h area, loses control in the gravel shoulder and collides with a large tree. The driver is killed instantly. What sorts of factors do you think could have led to this crash and the fatal outcome?*
3. (How) does risk-taking change as you get older, or circumstances change?  
*Explore for examples of anyone whose behaviour has changed*
4. Driving alone or with others – how does this change behaviour?
5. What about levels of personal responsibility – thinking about the consequences of taking risks whilst driving? Is this something that you think about? Why/why not?
6. What does "personal responsibility" mean to you? What would you be doing differently if you were being "personally responsible"? Why would / wouldn't you do this?
7. Do you anticipate that your attitudes and behaviour now is likely to change over time? *Why/why not? Has it already changed from when you first started driving? What has happened to change your attitude / behaviour?*

## 6. Scenario testing (15 minutes – 5 minutes per scenario)

*Moderator to present a series of scenarios, to ask respondents to think about what they might do in such a situation, how risky they perceive the situation to be. The purpose of this is to explore people's active or passive participation in risky driving behaviour, and the extent to which they are influenced by, or can influence, situations.*

*For each scenario ask:*

- a) How realistic a scenario is this for you? Anyone been in a similar situation?
  - b) How risky, if it all, do you see this situation?
  - c) If you were in this situation what would you want to do?
  - d) And what would you actually do?
  - e) What is the main thing that you'd be thinking about when you make the decision?
- You're out with friends and all of you are well over the .05 limit at a party. One of you wants to drive home and offers to give you a lift – there are no taxis available for ages, and it's too far to walk. *What about if there are more people in the car than there should be – does this make a difference to your decision?*
  - You're in a car with a few friends, driving at some speed. One of them (the driver) is not wearing a seatbelt.  
*Prompts: Would you suggest s/he puts it on? Would you make any kind of comment or ignore it completely? Would you wear yours? What about if you were the driver and it was one of your passengers?*
  - Your mate is driving during a night out, she/he has had no alcohol at all (you have) but has smoked a lot of cannabis (as you both have).  
*What if they'd also taken other drugs? What if they were prescription drugs – is that different or not?*

## 7. Talk the Toll Down Campaign Knowledge (5 minutes)

1. Have you ever heard of the Talk the Toll Down campaign?  
*Prompt with visual egs of campaign articles, if aware explore knowledge and relevance/salience*
2. Do you ever talk about risk-taking and driving with friends? With family?



## 8. Suggestions (5 minutes)

Do you think that anything can be done to moderate risky driving behaviour, the kinds of things that we have been talking about?

### **Thank you and close**

*That brings us to the end of the discussion questions. Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your opinions.*

*Do any of you have any questions about the study? Or anything else you would like to add?*

### Checklist

1. *Driving and road safety in general*
2. *Risky driving –what is it, what causes it*
3. *Risk and consequences – influences on risky behaviour, likelihood of getting 'caught'*
4. *Moderating behaviour, risk reduction and deterrents – what changes behaviour*
5. *Scenario testing*
6. *Talk the Toll Down*
7. *Suggestions*

## Appendix 2 Self-Completion Questionnaire

## Car Drivers – Victorian Regional Research

Thank you for taking part in this focus group. As part of this research, we would now like you to complete this short questionnaire. This will provide us with some additional information on people's thoughts and views on driving in regional Victoria.

**Your answers will be kept confidential.** The Social Research Centre will not pass on your details to anyone. Only anonymous results will be provided to the Transport Accident Commission (TAC).

Please answer the questions by putting a cross  in one box for each question (unless it states otherwise). If you have any queries, please ask one of the researchers.

---

### Road Accidents

**Q1** Please look at the list below. What do you think are the three main factors that most often lead to serious road accidents?

*Please write the three letters that correspond with your answers in the boxes below*

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>A</b> Young drivers          | <b>H</b> Tiredness/fatigue                         |
| <b>B</b> Alcohol                | <b>I</b> Road rage/impatience/aggressive driving   |
| <b>C</b> Distraction            | <b>J</b> Weather conditions                        |
| <b>D</b> Driver inexperience    | <b>K</b> Poor vehicle maintenance                  |
| <b>E</b> Drugs                  | <b>L</b> Disregard for road rules/reckless driving |
| <b>F</b> Road conditions/design | <b>M</b> Older drivers                             |
| <b>G</b> Speed                  | <b>N</b> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ).....      |

.....

**Driving Speed**

**Q2a** In your view, how fast should people be allowed to drive in a 100km/h zone without being booked for speeding? *Please write your answer in the box below*

km per hour

**Q2b** How often, if at all, have you driven above 100km/h in a 100km/h zone?

*Please cross  one box only*

- None of the time.....
- Occasionally .....
- Often .....
- All of the time .....

**Q3** Thinking about how fast or slow you travel when you are driving, what influences your driving speed?

*Please score each item 1 to 5, where 1 is 'not important at all' and 5 is 'very important'*

	Score out of 5
The speed limit	
The road conditions (gravel, paved, quality of the road surface, road design, etc.)	
The weather conditions (wet, windy, foggy etc.)	
My chances of being caught speeding	
The speed of other traffic	
The amount of traffic on the particular road	
Whether or not I have passengers in my car	
If I'm late/in a hurry	

**Q4** On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “Strongly disagree” and 5 is “Strongly agree”, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.

		Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither	Slightly agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
<i>Please circle one per row</i>							
a)	Speeding greatly increases my chances of crashing	1	2	3	4	5	6
b)	If I was to speed the next time I drive, I would have a high chance of being caught	1	2	3	4	5	6
c)	Penalties for speeding act as a deterrent when	1	2	3	4	5	6

	I'm driving						
d)	Enforcing the speed limit helps lower the road toll	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Driving and Drinking Alcohol**

**Q5** During the last 6 months, have you driven a car when you knew, or thought, you were over the legal drink/drive limit? *Please cross  one box only*

- Yes .....
- No .....
- I'd prefer not to say .....
- Not applicable (e.g. do not drink, no car or no licence).....

**Q6** If you were to drive while over the legal drink/drive limit, what would worry you the most?

*Please cross  one box only*

- Having a crash .....
- Injuring/killing yourself.....
- Hurting/killing someone else.....
- Getting stopped by the police.....
- Being fined or losing my licence.....
- Going to jail / prison.....
- Nothing would worry me.....
- Other (specify).....

**Q7** Generally speaking when you go out and drink alcohol, do you decide how you will get home..... *Please cross  one box only*

- ...before you start drinking? .....
- ...after you start drinking? .....
- It varies .....

**Q8** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Strongly disagree' and 5 is 'Strongly agree'

**Please circle one for each row**

		Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither	Slightly agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
a)	I would have no problem with telling a close friend not to drive if I thought they were over the legal drink/driving limit	1	2	3	4	5	6
b)	I would not get into a car driven by a friend if I thought they were over the legal drink/driving limit	1	2	3	4	5	6
c)	If I was driving and over the legal drink/driving limit, I am very likely to be caught	1	2	3	4	5	6
d)	The penalties for drink driving are too soft	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Driving and Taking Risks

**Q9** Using a scale where 0 is not at all dangerous and 10 is extremely dangerous, how dangerous do you think the following activities are? *Please circle one for each row*

	not dangerous	←-----→										extremely dangerous
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Reading a text whilst driving	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Driving after smoking cannabis	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Talking on a hand-held mobile whilst driving	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Driving with a blood/alcohol content of 0.05 or more	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not wearing a seatbelt	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Taking off quickly from traffic lights	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Doing 'burnouts'	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Having more people in a car than there are seats for	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

**Q10** Thinking about how you compare to the average driver on Victorian Roads, would you say that you are ... .. *Please cross  one box only*

- |                                   |                          |                                   |                          |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ... a much better driver .....    | <input type="checkbox"/> | ... a slightly worse driver ..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ... a better driver.....          | <input type="checkbox"/> | ... a worse driver .....          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ... a slightly better driver..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | ... a much worse driver .....     | <input type="checkbox"/> |

... an about average driver ...

... unsure/don't know .....

**Thank you for your time.  
Please now hand this questionnaire to the researcher.**

## **Be part of our Research Panel!**

As the researchers have mentioned, we are inviting you to be part of a wider study taking place over the next 6 months. This is an opportunity for you to give your experiences and views on driving in regional Victoria - you will be entered into a draw to win up to \$200 cash!.

To be part of this unique group, please sign the colour CONSENT FORM provided.