



Driver Behaviour in the Ambulance Service

**A study by
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Research Objectives

- **To research driver training and behaviour within the ambulance service, via semi-structured interviews**
- **To investigate ambulance driver behaviour, via questionnaire data, in comparison with the general working population**
- **To examine collision attribution and culpability within the ambulance service**
- **To identify driving-related stressors faced by ambulance personnel, such as type of call and time targets**

Driver Training

Recency of Training

- 62% of drivers with >3 yrs. service reported having received no subsequent driver training since induction
- 43% of drivers with >3 yrs. service said they had not been formally assessed during the previous three years

Further Training

- 87% of all drivers felt they and/or their colleagues would benefit from further training

Driver Training

Intensity and duration of induction training

- *"You have to completely change the way you've been taught to drive in a very short period of time."*

More time on blue-light driving

- *"I only had ten minutes then I was out on the road for real."*

Lack of training in ambulances

- *"You can't transfer skills from a car to an ambulance. It's like riding a racehorse then a shire-horse."*

Driver Behaviour

Post- Training Improvements

- 70% of ambulance drivers cited enhanced observation skills as the most noticeable improvement to their driving

'Red Mist'

- 66% of drivers recounted incidents of 'red mist', either through their own driving or with a colleague

Reporting bad driving within the service

- 50% of drivers were not aware of formal procedures
- 83% preferred to address bad driving informally

Driver Behaviour

Extent of bad driving within the service

- Perception of a cultural tendency towards avoidance of addressing bad driving practices
- Several drivers reported actually being scared by some of their colleagues
 - *"There's a couple of drivers on the station that scare me. I don't work with them anymore. Everybody will comment on their driving, "Whoa! Just watch yourself with them!"."*
- Local line managers unaware of tendency to address bad driving informally

Driver Behaviour

Questionnaire – Driver Stress Inventory (DSI)

- Hazard-Monitoring
- Thrill-Seeking
- Aggression
- Fatigue Proneness
- Dislike of Driving

Driver Behaviour

Questionnaire – Driver Coping Questionnaire (DCQ)

- Task Focus Coping
- Emotion Focus Coping
- Confrontive Coping
- Avoidance
- Reappraisal

DSI & DCQ: Associated Dimensions

▼ Thrill-Seeking = ▼ Aggression

▲ Fatigue Proneness = ▲ Dislike of Driving

▲ Hazard-Monitoring + ▼ Thrill-Seeking + ▼ Aggression
= ▲ Task Focus Coping

▼ Hazard-Monitoring + ▲ Thrill-Seeking + ▲ Aggression
= ▲ Confrontive Coping

Driver Behaviour

Ambulance drivers scored lower than general population on

- Dislike of Driving
- Fatigue Proneness
- Aggression

Ambulance drivers scored higher than general population on

- Hazard-Monitoring
- Task Focus Coping

... but, also scored higher on

- Thrill-Seeking

Collision Attribution

- **66% of ambulance drivers believed that collisions were the result of driver error**
- **54% of drivers recalled collision incidents**
 - **20% reported involvement in more than one collision**
 - **Drivers with highest scores on 'Aggression', 'Thrill-Seeking' and 'Confrontive Coping' were amongst those involved in blameworthy collisions**

Collision Culpability

- **79% of drivers rated their likelihood of future involvement in a non-blameworthy collision as higher than in a blameworthy collision**
- **No drivers felt they were more likely to be involved in a blameworthy collision than a non-blameworthy collision**
- **Ambulance drivers rated likelihood of involvement in a non-blameworthy collision as almost twice that of involvement in a blameworthy collision**

Driving-Related Stressors

46% of drivers cited age and condition of vehicles as a major source of stress

- ***"They're old. They're falling to pieces. There's always something wrong with them."***
- ***"When they've done 200,000 miles, are they really safe to be driving at high speeds?"***
- ***"Some have bad steering. Some have bad brakes. They all have problems. It's just trying to remember which has what."***

Driving-Related Stressors

Several drivers identified the failure of equipment as a stressor

- *"Sat Nav doesn't know dead end roads, footpaths or one-way streets. Sometimes you wanna just throw it out the window!"*
- *"Sometimes the lights and sirens interfere with the radio, so you have to turn the lights off, travel at normal speed, take down the information, then off again. That's stressful."*

Driving-Related Stressors

Some staff felt that the state of the fleet was due to poor funding decisions

- ***"Money goes on systems that are defunct and equipment that is unnecessary when it should be there to replace the fleet."***
- ***"They buy computers that don't work. They buy AVL which doesn't work. Meanwhile, we've got tatty 200,000 mile vehicles with dents and scratches and torn seats and lights that don't work."***

Driving-Related Stressors

Disregard for management also included treatment of staff, in terms of recognition and support

- *"The biggest stress that we're under is a lack of understanding from management. They have no idea what we do."*
- *"We're in a 'no win, no fee' society now, where often the staff will suffer. They don't feel they've got 100% backing of the company. The way the job's going, you're more and more isolated."*

Driving-Related Stressors

Whilst 79% of drivers denied being stressed by time targets, this provoked the strongest reactions to any question

- ***"I don't think any member of staff here is overly concerned about ORCONs."***
- ***"ORCON! ORCON is just a joke. I'll get there when I get there!"***
- ***"I'm not gonna risk me and my crew-mate's life just to hit an eight minute target. They can stuff that one really."***
- ***"If they were worried about ORCONs, they'd get new vehicles."***

Driving-Related Stressors

Drivers reported a conflict between time targets and driving safely

- *"There is so much pressure on response times, "You have to get there in eight minutes". That's what they hear, not, "You have to get there safely"."*
- *"You can only get there when traffic conditions allow."*

Driving-Related Stressors

38% of ambulance drivers identified other road users as their greatest driving-related stressor

- ***"They panic! Everybody panics; "Oh, what do I do?". That's probably the most stressful."***
- ***"They don't get out of the way. That's what stresses me out!"***
- ***"They make you quite stressed. They either don't get out of the way or they just come out and you have to come to a halt."***
- ***"They're not aware of their surroundings and don't see us coming."***

Driving-Related Stressors

How should other road users behave when approached by an ambulance on blues and twos?

- *"It would be nice if they looked in their mirror more often."*
- *"Slow down gradually and indicate that they are pulling over."*
- *"Pull over to the left and actually stop the car."*
- *"Pull over at the safest opportunity and wait until you've passed them."*

Driving-Related Stressors

Types of Call

- **67% of ambulance drivers identified paediatric calls as the most stressful**
 - *"Paediatrics are always gonna make everybody try and get there quicker, because of how quickly children deteriorate."*
 - *"I don't think anybody would say they don't try harder."*
- **29% of drivers cited cardiac arrests as stressful**
- **21% identified serious road traffic accidents as a source of stress**

Recommendations

Driver training could be improved by

- **Longer courses for induction training**
- **Focus on procedures to remedy bad driving practices**
- **More experience of driving in emergency conditions**
- **More time spent in ambulances rather than cars**
- **More frequent and regulated assessments which should allow earlier detection of lapses into bad driving practices**

Recommendations

High scores on 'Thrill-Seeking' indicate a tendency towards risky driving behaviours

- **This should be investigated further in relation to 'red mist'**

Additional opportunity for research into how the behaviour of other road users impacts performance against ORCONs



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