Road Rage

by Jenny Goebel
What is Road Rage?

“Road Rage” is a merely a novel name for aggressive driving.

According to Dr. Arnold Nerenberg, road rage is “…where one driver lets another driver know that he or she is angry because of something that the other driver did.”

Examples: obscene gestures, screaming, honking, slamming on the breaks, cutting off the other driver, brandishing a weapon, or even using a weapon.
How serious is Road Rage?

- Twenty eight thousand Americans died in 1996 because of aggressive driving.
- There are estimated to be close to two billion episodes of road rage per year in our nation.
- Eighty three percent of commercial drivers will be involved with a road rage incident.

(From Dr. Nerenberg’s testimony before the U.S. Congress.)
Incidents of Road Rage

“75-year old J.C. King -- peeved that 41-year-old Larry Remm Jr. honked at him for blocking traffic, hurled his prescription bottle at him, and then, smashed Remm’s knees with his 92nd Mercury.”

“Robin Ficker -- an attorney and ex legislator -- knocked the glasses off a pregnant women after she had the temerity to ask him why he bumped her Jeep with his.”

Close to home, “In Colorado Springs, 55-year-old Vern Smalley persuaded a 17-year-old boy who had been tailgating him to pull over; Smally decided that, rather than merely scold the lad, he would shoot him. (And he did. Fatally -- after the youth had threatened him.)

(From U.S. News & World Report, June 2, 1997)
What’s Behind all this Madness?

A review of research from 1973 to 1994 revealed characteristics common to aggressive drivers (Lowenstein, 1997):

- Type A personality
- Life stress at home or work
- Quick irritation with other drivers
- Tendency to dehumanize other drivers
- A feeling of safety within the car environment to express anger and aggression
- A tendency toward outward rather than inward expressions of anger.
Causes Cont...

- Congestion
- Lower-Density Lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels in young males (Davidson et al., 1996)
- Over-long exposure to the driving experience (Harding et al., 1998)
- Temperature (Kenrick et al., 1986)
- When car is perceived as a territory (Marsh & Collett, 1987)
- Status of Frustrator (Chase & Mills, 1973)
- Time of day (Hauber, 1980)
Is Road Rage a Gender Issue?

Dr. Nerenberg says, “Not really. Based on my preliminary research of about 585 interviews, 45 percent of road-rage incidents are committed by women, and 55 percent are committed by men. It appears that men are doing most of the shootings and women are doing most of the ramming.”

But research suggests otherwise:

- LDL’s
- Aggression Behavior towards pedestrian (Hauber, 1980)
- Youth and maleness strong predictors (Reason et al., 1990)
Problems with the Research

- Self-report
- Selection Bias
- Third Variable Problem
- External Validity
Lowenstein (1997) suggests awareness and therapeutic techniques including:

- relaxation skills
- physical exercise
- anger control training
- systematic desensitization
- habit breaking
- self-monitoring or self-regulation method.
Solutions Cont..

- State Legislature
- Driver Improvement Courses
- Electronic Billboards
- Photo Radar
- Cellular Phone numbers to help identify aggressive drivers
- Zero Tolerance Programs
- Unique Solutions
- Education Vs. Enforcement
Final Thoughts

- Although Road Rage may seem to be a fairly new or increasing concern, some researchers argue that it’s “Just Same Old Risky Driving.” (Consumers Research Magazine, 1999). Despite claims that there has been a 51% increase in violent highway incidents since 1990, “There’s no objective evidence to support the notion that highway hostility is increasing. There always have been hostile drivers.” Brian O’Neil, President of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, points out.

- Could the alarming issue of “Road Rage” be merely a vividness problem created by the media? Only future research will tell.
References


