

Perceived Risk and Driving Behavior: Lessons for Improving Traffic Safety in Emerging Market Countries

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ABSTRACT

Very often the risks of driving are expressed in terms of the total number of deaths that occur yearly as the result of motor vehicle operation. Yet, despite the thousands of people who die each year in automobiles in the U.S. alone, driving behavior seems relatively unresponsive to statistical portrayals of risk. Research in risk perception suggests that this apparent unresponsiveness is rooted in the manner by which risks are psychologically evaluated and judged. In general, perceptions of controllability of a hazard are a prime factor in personal assessments of its riskiness. Unfortunately, drivers appear to have an exaggerated sense of their personal control over driving situations and hazard potential, leaving them unrealistically optimistic about their chances of avoiding harm. However, emerging market countries seeking to develop better motor vehicle risk management are cautious about drawing too heavily upon risk perception research conducted in industrialized countries with mature risk management institutions — risk as a concept appears highly conditioned on the cultural context within which it is experienced. Thus, emerging nations are encouraged to develop risk management approaches within their own cultural matrix, relying on a base of research stimulated by cross-cultural collaboration.

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