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Boets, S. et Meesmann, U. (2014) *Vitesse et vitesse excessive. Résultats de la mesure d'attitudes en matière de sécurité routière menée tous les trois ans par l'IBSR*. Bruxelles, Belgique : Institut Belge pour la Sécurité Routière – Centre de Connaissance Sécurité Routière

Summary

The Belgian Institute for Road Safety (BIVV/IBSR) attitude survey 2012 is based on 1,540 interviews with drivers whose principal residence is in Belgium and who had driven a car or delivery van at least 1,500 km in the six months preceding the interview. The interviews were conducted verbally by the research agency Significant GfK in September and October 2012.

In the attitude survey, respondents were asked to provide their opinion on a number of statements. Each attitude statement was examined to determine whether or not there was a correlation between the statement and certain driver characteristics (gender, age and region). The percentages were also calculated for the different categories of answers; where possible the figures were compared with those from previous attitude measurement surveys conducted by the BIVV/IBSR and with results from other sources. It looked for the existence of significant differences depending on the respondent's gender, age or region.

The attitude survey 2012 comprised several sections. This report only includes results related to speed. Excessive and inappropriate speeds represent major risk factors in road traffic. As inappropriate speed is highly context-dependent and consequently more difficult to investigate (particularly because there is insufficient knowledge about adjusted speeds in specific circumstances), the Belgian Institute for Road Safety (BIVV/IBSR) traditionally measures experiences and opinions related to excessive speeds in the attitude survey.

Self-reported speeding prevalence

The main results related to speed and speeding based on self-reported behaviour are:

- Belgian drivers admit that they frequently exceed speed limits. Almost nine in ten admit to having occasionally driven up to 10km/h faster than the legal speed limit in the past year. One in two even did so frequently to (almost) always. The high frequencies of speeding reported confirm the large number of speeding violations observed in the BIVV/IBSR 2012 road side survey on speed.
- With regard to specific speed patterns it appears that reported speeding in 30 km/h zones is the most problematic. 71% of drivers admit to having occasionally driven 50km/h in these zones and one in four even admitted to doing so often. Driving 70km/h in a built-up area where the speed limit is 50km/h was also reported by over half of the drivers (57%). In the past year, 15% did this frequently. Two in three drivers admit to having occasionally driven 20km/h too fast on a motorway and one in four did so often to (almost) always if the situation allowed.
- Once more these findings reveal that failure to respect speed limits is a widespread phenomenon in Belgium. Most Belgian drivers sometimes or frequently drive over the limit; thus it does not merely involve a limited risk group. Nevertheless, more men and young drivers report that they drive too fast. The younger the driver, the more likely he/she is to admit to speeding. Compared with Walloon drivers, their Flemish counterparts admit significantly more often that they have driven 50km/h on roads with a 30km/h speed limit.
- These results are consistent with Belgian results from the European SARTRE4 survey (2010). In this survey, 15% of Belgian drivers admitted their intention to often exceed the speed limit in a built-up area by 20km/h in the month to come. The EU average was 11%. Therefore Belgians state this intention significantly more often than the average European.

Awareness of the risk of an accident as a result of driving (too) fast

- Driving at an excessive speed is perceived as the main cause of road traffic accidents out of sixteen possible causes. The Belgian driver estimates that a little over one in two accidents (54%) is caused by excessive speed. Thus, in general terms, Belgians do indeed recognise the increased risk of an accident due to speed.
- Never before, since the first attitude survey in 2003, has there been a lower percentage of drivers who agreed with the premise 'driving fast puts your own life in danger as well as that of others' (74%). In comparison with this result in 2009 (80%), we see a significant decline in the general perception of the risk of driving fast. In 2012, we are further than ever from the General

Assembly on Road Safety's (SGVV/EGSR) target that at least 80% would agree with this premise. Men, 18- 29 year olds, and Flemish drivers are significantly less likely to agree with this premise than women, people aged 30 and over, and Walloons and residents of Brussels.

- The further differentiation of underlying views reveals that the vast majority of Belgian drivers (84%) do agree that driving too fast increases the risk of serious accidents. Nevertheless, a large percentage does not believe that driving 10km/h too fast (44%) or driving too fast on deserted roads at night (33%) increases the risk of an accident or danger. The risk of driving too fast does appear to be recognised in general terms, but this perception is strikingly more limited to specific situations. We also observe a significant decline compared with 2009 in the risk perception of accidents related to a limited speeding violation (up to 10km/h). The limited risk perception among Belgian drivers was also observed in the European SARTRE4 survey (2010). Among Belgian drivers, 26% believed that the risk of an accident does not increase if one drives 20km/h too fast in a built-up area. Only two other European countries scored lower than Belgium on this point.
- Risk perception varies significantly depending on gender, age and region. The oldest drivers (63 and over) are significantly more likely to believe that driving fast increases the risk of a serious accident than 18-62 year olds. Men are more likely to believe that the risk of driving too fast on deserted roads at night is limited compared with women. Drivers of 18-49 years old and Flemish drivers are far less likely to agree that a speed increase of 10km/h leads to a major increase in the risk of an accident than people aged 50 and over, Walloons and Brussels residents. Women, older drivers and residents of Brussels generally hold the safest views on risk. The overall higher volume of road traffic (and resulting increased potential for conflict between road users) in the Brussels-Capital Region, in which respondents from Brussels perhaps drive more often, possibly plays a role in this increased risk perception.

Perceived social norms related to driving (too) fast

- The attitude survey also examined the impact of the social environment on driving behaviour and risk perception. Views on the statement that one's acquaintances/friends believe that one must respect speed limits (the so-called 'subjective norm') were divided: almost one in two drivers do not experience social pressure to respect speed limits. Moreover 67% agree with the statement that drivers who never exceed applicable speed limits are rare. In other words: two in three Belgian drivers adopt a 'descriptive norm' (i.e. what one observes in others) that almost all drivers occasionally drive too fast. Such beliefs make it difficult to effectively change behaviour because of the perception that everyone does it. Other BIVV/IBSR studies (a survey as part of the 2013 speed campaign; SARTRE4, 2010) also reveal that in general Belgian drivers only experience or perceive social influences that support correct speed behaviour to a limited extent. In comparison with other European countries Belgium scores very poorly in this area.
- Men, young people and the Flemish are significantly less likely to believe that their social environment thinks one must respect the speed limits than women, older drivers and Walloons. The younger the person, the less likely he or she is to agree with this. Furthermore, the Flemish (and women, but this is a trend) are significantly more likely to believe that drivers that never drive too fast are rare, than Walloons (and men).
- Belgian drivers also believe that driving 20km/h too fast (on a deserted motorway, in a built-up area or in a 30 km/h zone), is the most personally acceptable of all kinds of dangerous driving behaviour. Driving 70km/h in a built-up area is perceived to be just as acceptable as a parking violation. By far the most acceptable action is driving 140km/h on a motorway. This is found to be acceptable by 41% and one in four even think it is 'completely' acceptable.
- The high level of acceptability of driving too fast in a 30 zone, in a built-up area (50km/h) and on a motorway is reflected in driving behaviour as well as in attitudes related to speeding. Only 56% of drivers believe that speeding is socially unacceptable (while the General Assembly on Road Safety premised 80% for 2008). This finding largely explains the current speed problem. As long as speeding is believed to be socially acceptable, it is very difficult to (permanently) change this behaviour.
- A large number of additional efforts must thus be made to convince drivers in Belgium that speeding is socially and personally unacceptable.

Support for current speed limits and perceived behavioural control

- One of the possible underlying reasons for the wide social acceptance of speeding is limited support for the existing speed limits. Only 57% of the drivers, a slight decrease compared with 2009 (60%), believe that speed limits are established at an acceptable level. Remarkably, one in four drivers (26%) totally disagrees with this and probably finds existing speed limits to be too strict. This is an important finding given that drivers possibly tend to violate speed limits in certain locations where they feel that the speed limits are unacceptable. This finding highlights the importance of credible speed limits and information and the raising of awareness about the reasons behind the speed limits.
- We observe significantly reduced support for speed limits among men, 18-29 year olds and 39-49 year olds, and among the Flemish, compared with women, people aged 63 and over and residents of Brussels. Those in the 30-38 age group are more likely to believe that speed limits are acceptable than age groups that directly precede and succeed them (there is even a trend difference with those aged between 18 and 29).
- 39% of drivers indicate that they are themselves the best judge of their personal safe driving speed limit, even if this is higher than the legal limit. This is consistent with the findings related to the acceptability level regarding speed limits and suggests that over one in three drivers has more confidence in his/her own perception of safe speed limits than in the legal limits. It also appears that almost half of the respondents (46%) are not always aware of the applicable speed limit. This suggests that speeding violations are not always consciously perpetrated. In all, two in three drivers agree that speeding makes it more difficult to react properly in a dangerous situation.

Subjective advantages of driving (too) fast

- Subjectively linking positive emotions to high speed is also one of the possible underlying factors related to speeding. One in four drivers appears to enjoy driving fast. This figure is slightly more than one in three among the youngest drivers (aged 18-29). It is predominantly the youngest drivers that link speed to this positive emotion.
- Nevertheless the subjective perception of saving time by speeding only plays a role among a small percentage of Belgian drivers. 13% agree that people have to drive fast because if they don't, they have the impression that they are losing time.
- Men, the youngest age group (18-29), and drivers from Brussels find driving fast considerably more enjoyable than women, those aged 30 and over and the Flemish. The younger the respondent, the more likely he or she is to hold the view that he or she must drive fast to avoid losing time. The 18-38 age group is significantly more likely to believe this than those aged 50 and over.

Conclusion

Speeding is still widespread and socially accepted among Belgian drivers. This behaviour is a main cause of the still fairly high number of road traffic victims in our country compared with other European countries.

Young and male drivers represent the primary problem groups and measures should be primarily focused on these groups. Efforts to raise awareness must focus on the problematic social norms and level of personal acceptability of speeding. This underlines the importance of systematic and widespread actions that involve society as a whole (using broad and target group focused communication, education, driver formation, etc.). Another starting point for raising awareness is the limited risk awareness related to driving too fast in specific situations. Given the limited support for existing speed limits, it is also important (after determining logical speed limits consistent with the road layout) to inform drivers and to raise awareness in relation to the logic behind these limits.

Raising awareness must also go consistently hand in hand with enforcement. Over the years, the objective risk of being caught when speeding has clearly increased, and in one of the other BIVV/IBSR 2012 attitude survey reports (Meesmann & Boets, 2014a) it is revealed that the subjective risk of being caught speeding is higher than for other themes. However we see little change in the subjective risk of being caught compared with 2009, and the 2006 level was considerably higher. This underlines the importance of further efforts to increase the subjective risk of being caught. Communication also plays a major role in

this respect. In short, raising awareness and enforcement will thus continue to be extremely important in the coming years.

Need for further research

On the basis of the results of this study and the current status of academic research, the BIVV/IBSR calls for further research in the following areas:

- Continuation of attitude surveys and road side surveys related to speed.
- More detailed research into underlying behavioural determinants related to speeding, particularly interaction effects and the effect of other variables besides the three core variables (age, gender and region), such as level of education, professional category, socioeconomic status, ethnic origin, vehicle characteristicsbrand, driving frequency and exposure.
- More detailed research into underlying behavioural determinants related to speeding in terms of socio-cognitive variables.
- Analysis of the influence of the social norm related to (the acceptability of) speeding.
- Analysis of the international differences in behaviour and of the responsible factors.
- Broadening research relating to inappropriate speed.
- Research into the influence of road and personal characteristics on the credibility of speed limits.
- Assessment of the possibility of including speed variables in road traffic accident forms. Research into the effectiveness of measures/tools for influencing speed behaviour (such as vehicle technology like ISA; road infrastructure like speed reducers, road categorisation; education and raising awareness).



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