EMPATHY, CONFORMITY AND CULTURAL FACTORS RELATED TO ABERRANT DRIVING BEHAVIOUR IN A SAMPLE OF TURKISH URBAN DRIVERS

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ABSTRACT

AIM: Few previous studies using the Driver Behaviour Questionnaire examined the link between reported driver behaviour, social influence and cultural factors. The aim of this study is to examine the role of empathy and conformity traits, as well as cultural individualism/collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, for aberrant driving behaviours in a sample of Turkish urban drivers. Very few studies have examined how empathy and conformity traits relate to aberrant driving behaviours. Empathy and conformity traits are crucial factors in social interaction, and may be important for aberrant driving behaviours. Similar to traits, culture may be relatively stable over time and could also relate to aberrant driver behaviours. Trait and cultural factors related to driver behaviour have often been studied in separation, but the present study aims to integrate these perspectives and examine them in parallel. In the present study, we operationalize culture by its consequences on psychological constructs such as attitudes, values and beliefs (Hofstede, 1980). This framework has a strong empirical tradition and several attempts to measure culture using this theory have been made in recent decades (e.g. Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis, 1995). The proposed presentation is based on findings from a finalized study.

METHOD: This questionnaire survey is based on a sample consisting of 179 drivers obtained in Izmir and Istanbul. The respondents were approached and recruited by convenience sampling in neighborhoods with different socio-demographic characteristics by trained local research assistants with expert knowledge about socio-demographic characteristics in these two cities. Data were also collected at various gatherings, including markets, work places and university campuses in both cities. The respondents completed validated measures of the personality traits and cultural factors of interest. Two linear hierarchical block regression analyses (enter method) were carried out to examine whether reported driving errors and violations were predicted by the trait and cultural factors

RESULTS: Results showed that the traits and cultural factors were associated with driving violations and errors. The ability to conceive the emotions of others (empathy) was related to lower levels of reported driving errors and violations, whereas a tendency to amend behaviour in line with behaviour of
others (conformity) was related to higher levels. Avoiding uncertainty also had a relation to more reported error conduct. Vertical individualism (striving to be distinct and for social status) was associated with higher levels of driving errors and violations, while vertical collectivism (striving for social equality and hierarchy) was related to lower levels of driving violations.

**CONCLUSION**: The findings highlight the social pressure from other drivers to commit driving violations, and suggest that interventions aimed at reducing aberrant driving behaviours in urban Turkish settings should focus on increasing drivers’ resistance to this pressure. Driving behaviour interventions carried out in Turkish urban environments could benefit by taking into account trait and cultural differences. Based on our results, it may be suggested that there is a potential to reduce aberrant driving behaviour through interventions tailored to create a more compromising and collaborating approach, and that provide opportunities for the expression of competitive tendencies in domains other than road traffic. Also, stress management and tension-reducing approaches could be integrated into Turkish urban traffic campaigns. The current results also imply that young male drivers should be specifically targeted in terms of violations.

**REFERENCES**

