

Keynote speech

Driver anger, causes, consequences, and remedies

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Anger can be defined as an emotional state, or, as Lakoff (1987) metaphorically describes it, “anger is the heat of liquid in a container.” It varies in frequency, intensity, and duration, and can range from mild irritation to intense fury and rage.

Anger may or may not lead to aggression, and a person can be angry without acting aggressively. If anger represents the emotional state, aggression can be described as its behavioural response, either immediate or planned, intended to harm, hurt, or injure another person or object. Thus, although anger and aggression are related, they are not synonymous; one can experience anger without becoming aggressive.

Studies have shown that a large proportion of drivers experience anger while driving, and some researchers even argue that its prevalence is increasing. Driving anger can be triggered by a range of psychological, environmental, and situational factors. It is known to affect not only drivers’ psychological well-being but also to provoke various unsafe driving behaviours, including speeding, dangerous overtaking, tailgating, and disregard for traffic regulations. Even mild forms of anger can negatively influence driving performance and contribute to increased crash risk, posing a threat not only to the driver but also to other road users.

Furthermore, anger can heighten physiological responses such as increased heart rate and elevated blood pressure, which may in turn affect an individual’s mental and physical health. These combined behavioural and physiological effects underscore the importance of understanding and mitigating driving anger as part of broader road safety efforts.

Although aggressive driving is often viewed as socially unacceptable, some argue that aggressive behaviour behind the wheel is nonetheless tolerated and at times even excused. This tolerance may stem from cultural norms in many societies that encourage assertiveness, competitiveness, and risk taking. Additional explanations include the symbolic meaning of the car as a source of power and status, as well as the sense of protection and anonymity it provides, which may reduce drivers’ inhibitions and increase the likelihood of acting aggressively.

The aim of this presentation is to discuss driver anger, its causes, its consequences and the measures that can be taken to prevent it.