

## THE ROLE OF DIFFICULTIES IN EMOTION REGULATION ON DRIVING BEHAVIOR

### *IMPACTO DE LAS DIFICULTADES EN LA REGULACIÓN EMOCIONAL SOBRE EL COMPORTAMIENTO DE LOS CONDUCTORES*

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#### Abstract

The present study tested associations among difficulties in emotion regulation and driving styles. One-hundred and thirty seven Argentinean drivers completed self-report measures of difficulties in emotion regulation and driving styles. As expected, greater difficulties in different types of emotion regulation abilities were related to anxious, angry, dissociative and risky driving. By contrast, lesser difficulties in regulating emotions were associated with careful driving. Stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed a differential contribution of specific types of emotion regulation abilities to each driving style. Importance of assessing emotional skills in candidates' examination to obtain/renewal driving license and emotion regulation based-interventions for drivers with maladaptive driving behaviors is emphasized. Limitations and future directions are also discussed.

*Keywords:* Difficulties in emotion regulation, driving styles, Traffic Psychology.

## Resumen

El objetivo del presente estudio consistió en evaluar la relación entre las dificultades en la regulación de las emociones y los estilos de conducción vehicular. Se aplicaron medidas de autoinforme a una muestra de 137 conductores argentinos que conducían vehículos regularmente. Conforme a las hipótesis que sustentaron este trabajo, se observó que aquellos conductores que presentaban mayores dificultades en diferentes dimensiones de regulación emocional presentaron un estilo de conducción más ansioso, agresivo, disociativo y riesgoso. Por el contrario, los conductores con menores dificultades para regular sus emociones evidenciaron un estilo de conducción más cordial y prudente. Por otra parte, análisis de regresión múltiple (método stepwise) revelaron que las dimensiones de regulación emocional realizaron una contribución diferencial en la predicción de los diferentes estilos de conducción. Se destaca la importancia de incluir en la evaluación no sólo las aptitudes psico-físicas sino también emocionales tanto en los aspirantes a la obtención como en la renovación del permiso de conducir y se ofrecen algunas propuestas para el desarrollo de programas de entrenamiento en regulación emocional para conductores con estilos de manejo desadaptativos. Finalmente, se exponen las limitaciones de este trabajo y se recomiendan futuras líneas de investigación.

*Palabras clave:* Dificultades en la regulación emocional, estilos de conducción, Psicología del Tránsito.

## Introduction

Traffic accidents constitute a global social and economic problem; around 1.24 million people die every year on the world's roads and another 20 to 50 million suffer nonfatal injuries due road traffic crashes. Road traffic injuries are currently the eighth leading cause of death around the world, the first cause of death for young people aged 15-29 years old and result in considerable financial costs, especially to developing economies. In this regard, the devastating effects of traffic crashes are concerned not only with global public health but also with sustainable development (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013).

Although certainly there are many factors that cause traffic crashes (see Haddon, 1980), it has been commonly acknowledged that human factor plays a more important role beyond other factors such as vehicle, road, etc (Rumar, 1990; United States General Accounting Office, 2003; Wang, 1995). Consequently, a particular interest has been shown to drivers' behaviors (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, 1997). Research in this domain has been primarily concerned in identifying variables which may influence accident involvement and risk-taking behavior in traffic (Ulleberg & Rundmo, 2003).

In this context, Elander, West and French (1993) argued that car accident liability is associated with

driving skill and driving style. Driving skill refers to the capability of drivers to maintain control over the vehicle and respond in an adaptively way to complex traffic situations. This skill is assumed to increase with practice or training. By style they referred to the ways drivers choose to drive or to their habitual driving mode, including features such as speed, headway, and trait levels of attentiveness and assertiveness, and is expected to be influenced by attitudes and beliefs regarding driving, as well as by more general needs and values.

In an effort to provide a conceptualization and measurement of a person's habitual driving style, Taubman-Ben-Ari, Mikulincer and Gillath (2004) distinguished among eight different driving styles in which individuals may usually engage in: (1) the dissociative driving style, which reflects the tendency to be distracted while driving and to commit driving errors due to this distraction; (2) the anxious driving style, which refers to the proneness to feel anxiety and distress during driving and to express lack of security about his or her driving skills; (3) the risky driving style, which relates to thrill seeking while driving, deliberate violation of safe driving norms and the tendency to engage in risky behaviors such as tailgate other drivers,

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