Young drivers, road policing, deterrence theory and punishment avoidance

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Deterrence theory

- Certainty
- Severity
- Swiftness

Deterrence
Punishment avoidance

Commit offence + No punishment = Punishment avoidance
Punishment avoidance

Certainty and severity
Focus groups

- Two Australian states: Queensland and Victoria
- 31 participants
- Participants ages:
  - Queensland 17 to 25 years
  - Victoria 18 to 25 years
- 45% male
- 11 focus groups
  - 45% in Queensland
  - 55% in Victoria
  - 63% in regional locations
Punishment avoidance

- Direct and vicarious avoidance from police
- Active punishment avoidance
- Parental punishment avoidance

Punishment avoidance
ACTIVE PUNISHMENT AVOIDANCE
Deliberate and conscious efforts to avoid police and their operations
Remove P plates that indicate licence status

‘Often people just take off their P plates so – and pretend they’re, like, full[y] licensed. So they can carry more people.’ (Male, Queensland, Regional)
Select the roads they travel on

‘It's like when I'm driving home on the highway, the bits that I know have speed cameras on it, I'll be a lot more cautious than just like the back-road strips.’ (Male, Queensland, Metropolitan)

‘...so there are roads, back roads and no one travels on them, so [I] tend not to care as much and never been caught, so I’m going to keep doing it.’ (Female, Victoria, Regional)
Perceived that avoiding punishment meant they could engage in illegal behaviours

‘... it’s like a rural road and the speed limit’s 110, and there’s no one on it, like you know, no one’s going to see if you do 120...’ (Male, Victoria, Regional)

‘I know it's quite a common thing back where I live in Sydney. Often people just take off their P plates so - and pretend they're, like, full licence. So they can carry more people.’ (Male, Queensland, Regional)
DIRECT AND VICARIOUS AVOIDANCE FROM POLICE
Caught by the police for illegal behaviours but the officer decided not to punish them
If it involved the young driver themselves, it was direct punishment avoidance

‘This one time I came home for our town's races and I was driving home the next morning and a local cop who I know pulled me over and then when he pulled me over and saw that it was me, like oh crap, I better not breatho [roadside breath test] you because you're definitely going to blow over. So I reckon they know the rules, but they're just a bit lax on them [regional police].’ (Male, Victoria, Metropolitan)
If it occurs to others, it was vicarious punishment avoidance.

‘I was in the car with my dad when he was speeding and he talked himself out of a ticket.’ (Male, Victoria, Regional)

‘I was in a car with my friend, she was on her green Ps, and she was doing 17 over the speed limit, and the same happened - the cop just gave her a warning and stuff, and then she just kept going - she didn't get a fine or anything, and it didn't really phase her or anything - like she still speeds and stuff.’ (Female, Queensland, Metropolitan)
Can be both punished and avoid punishment

‘I'm a New South Wales P plater, so I'm green Ps and I've had my Ps since I was 17, and I could have got my full licence last April but I've moved here and just been pretty lazy about it. But over the Good Friday weekend, I was done speeding and got away with a DUI, that one, just because she knew that she was going to take my licence anyway, she was like, oh, well, I won't do your DUI as well. So I lost my licence for three months and by the time I get it back I'll just go get my fulls [open license] and back on it.’

(Male, Victoria, Metropolitan)
Perceived that avoiding punishment meant they could engage in illegal behaviours

‘She even said to me if you ever got pulled over just tell them that’s your sister, your brother. They can't tell you it's not. Yeah, I think it made her do it a few more times.’ (Female, Queensland, Regional)

‘I feel like yeah because they think well they didn't get a fine, they're like oh well, I can just get away with it and stuff, it doesn't really matter.’ (Female, Queensland, Metropolitan)
PARENTAL PUNISHMENT AVOIDANCE
Even when punished by police, parents can facilitate punishment avoidance
Parents take monetary fine and/or demerit points for speed camera offences

‘I know my parents would do that for me if that was the case but it hasn't happened yet.’ (Female, Queensland, Regional)

‘I reckon my parents would, but not for more than one time. It would be, like, a one-time thing.’ (Male, Queensland, Regional)
Conclusions and implications

• Young drivers experience punishment avoidance in a range of ways
• Encourages them to continue to engage in offending on the roads
• Police officers should not allow young drivers to escape punishment
  – There may be a need to provide training to officers around the implications of punishment avoidance
Questions?

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