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It is not age that determines risk-taking behaviour, but the extent to which the person copes with their stages of development

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In Project LaWida ("Längsschnittliche Analysen der Wege in die Automobilität" [Longitudinal analyses of approaches to driving mobility]), researchers and practitioners of transport safety work have joined forces to conduct joint research into the transition of young people as they approach driving age. This study, supported by the Deutscher Verkehrssicherheitsrat [German Road Safety Council] (DVR), is the first to observe a group of young people long before they have reached their 18th birthday and investigate their thoughts and ideas, attitudes and changes as regards the driving aspect of life.

The study's target group are young people between 13 and 17, who, starting in 2009, were surveyed four times a year with a specially designed questionnaire. When selecting the sample, an effort was made to achieve a balanced distribution of sexes, schooling type visited and spatial structure of accommodation.

They were asked about the following aspects of life:

Plans for a driving licence; recreational behaviour; the role of peers in their life; the attitude to their stages of development, values and personality; values associated with driving and cars; desire for a car and planned driving behaviour; estimation of risk and standard acceptance in life and road transport; socio-demographic variables; family environment and style of upbringing; and the role of the car in their families and friendship groups.
In addition, anonymised data was collected on age, sex, origin, nationality, agglomeration area, form of schooling and exam aspirations and the social status of the families.

At the same time, both parents were questioned with an abridged survey tool on their attitudes, values and family set-up; the anonymised data was encoded and assigned to the questionnaire results of the young people.

In the meantime, the questionnaires were completed and the data from the first questionnaire cycle was subjected to academic analysis. The detailed report on this will be produced by June 2015 at the latest. A longitudinal analysis of all the results will be produced later.

Initial analysis on the basis of the questionnaire of 1,179 young people allows the following statements to be made:

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- The young people are divided into three risk groups with potentially **high** (cluster 1), **medium** (cluster 2) or **low** risk (cluster 3)[1]. This also coincides with other assessments.

- In the cluster 1 and 2 risk groups (high and medium risk), male youths are overrepresented while female youths are more predominant in cluster 3 (low risk).

- Place of residence and agglomeration area (congestion and environment) do not make a statistically significant difference.

- Students of upper secondary schools (Gymnasium) are underrepresented in clusters 1 and 2 (high and medium risk) and tend rather to be in the low-risk group, while all the other forms of schooling are less frequently represented in cluster 3 (low risk).

- No distinctive statistical features regarding risk assignment (cluster assignment) are found to depend on the age of the young people.

- By considering age and schooling type on a differentiated basis, the following stands out:

   Students of upper secondary schools between 13 and 14 in the high-risk group are still overrepresented. Between 15 and 16, they are underrepresented in the high-risk group. The opposite process is observed for students at "Realschule" (intermediate secondary school): they are less commonly represented between 13 and 14 in the high-risk group, while between 15 and 16 they are more commonly represented in the high-risk group.

It can be said as a provisional result that the biological age alone does not necessarily have an influence on the difference between the risk typologies. Rather, it is apparent from further analysis that the stage of the person's development seems to be the determining factor for membership to the risk clusters. If coping at the friends[2], autonomy[3] and adult role[4] areas of personal development is still insufficient or has not yet started, it indicates an affiliation with risk clusters 1 and 2 (high and medium risk).

By analysing personality traits, it is noticeable that on an individual level, a tendency to have an increased inner readiness to use violence while low social compatibility (masculinity) seems to be indicative of being in cluster 1 (high risk).

These results seem to be linked with a need to reorient (differentiate) preventive road safety work with young people, which will also have an influence on professional drivers' training. A differentiated approach (e.g. "Client-centred-teaching") appears to be indispensable.

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[1] Assignment according to a two-stage cluster process (hierarchical cluster analysis, subsequent cluster centre analysis), whereby a three-cluster solution was offered.
[2] Readjustment of the social relationships to peers
[3] Detachment from the parental home
[4] Confrontation with the role of adult

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Author's CV:

Heinz Albert Stumpen is working at the German Police University as a Head of the Faculty Traffic Management.

For more than 30 years he worked for the Police of North Rhine-Westphalia as a Police officer at operational and management levels.

Before his professorship at the Police University he was responsible for establishing, maintaining and continuous improvement of the Strategy of road safety management by the Police Forces in the City of Münster.

As a lecturer for road safety issues he cooperates with different academies and universities at international level, i.e. Romania, Estonia, Lebanon and others.

Heinz Albert Stumpen has just passed an exam for certification as lead Auditor for Road Traffic Safety Management Systems according to the ISO-Standard 39001.

One of the research projects in his faculty is to determine the risk behaviour of young drivers. The first findings of the research are provided in his presentation.