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Does education have a role in becoming a safe and responsible driver?

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New drivers are the highest-risk group for traffic safety. Different studies have shown that the first six months after the license is granted, is the highest risk period in novice drivers' career. This is due to the lack of driving experience and the age and personal related factors. Does education have an impact at all? Can we monitor this?

More than a decade Finnish Traffic safety Agency (Trafi) has been following what kind of impact the education and the testing system has in category B to novice driver's competence for safe driving in Finland.

The purpose of the index study is to monitor the traffic behaviour of new drivers by combining information on driving instruction and exam scores with the number of accidents and offences in the first year of driving. The index study allows examination of a long time series to find whether there have been changes in the traffic safety of young and new drivers.

Due to the nature of this study, over 16 years, it gives an excellent opportunity to monitor the effect of different educational systems in place. Rather substantial changes have been made to driving instruction even in recent years, affecting both its structure and its administration. During this study time there has been a two stage training system, a three staged training system and in the future there will be a one stage system in driver training in category B. Each year 8000 novice drivers are targeted in this study.

The information is collected through questionnaires sent to drivers who were granted a category B driving license in the previous year. The study involves collecting information on how satisfied new drivers are with their driving instruction, evaluations of how well the driving instruction prepared them for independent driving, and the information on traffic accidents and offences during the past year.

The aim of this presentation is to introduce the main results of the current index study and to demonstrate the development of different factors through the years the study has been conducted. Since the study is repeated every year, the results can be compared rapidly to the changes made in the structure of driving instruction system. The functionality and the reactions to these changes are easy to find out because the feedback is collected directly from the new drivers.

As a result of the study different kinds of analyses are made between different kinds of driver groups. The comparisons are made, for instance, between the drivers who attend a driving school and drivers who get their education under an instruction permit held by the instructor they know. This way we have been able to evaluate which parts of the education are considered to enhance learners driving skills more when they are able to practice outside the driving school more flexible with their own schedule.

The index values, calculated alongside other analyses, describe the examination and on-road success of novice drivers as well as the acquirements the new drivers get from the education. The information used in index calculation is collected both from the survey answers and from the background information. The background information includes, for example, the score the learner has scored in the practical test and the number of hours the learner has taken on-road before the test.

We will also discuss other relevant study results that has shed light on the impact of education especially for young male drivers.