



WORK MATTERS

COLUMN

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Aggressive Driving and Road Rage over the Years in Trinidad and Tobago.

On the roads and by-ways in this society, aggressive driving has become an individualist normal behaviour. It would seem that the individual is a constantly angry, impatient, motorist who gives little or no thought to the injuries or fatality that his/her driving may cause; be it a pedestrian or someone in another vehicle. Aggressive driving may also occur when a motorist drives his/her vehicle into a building or someone's property, and this 'road rage' and associated anti-social behavior is indeed a troubling and dangerous phenomenon locally.

It has been argued that the majority of aggressive drivers are young males, who are often drinking while intoxicated by alcohol or drugs, both of which slows reflexes and reduces inhibitions, all leading to increasingly poorer driving. It should also be noted that aggressive drivers come from across all socioeconomic status spectrums in our society; many of whom have no history of alcohol or drug abuse or violence. While the weapons most commonly used by aggressive drivers are the vehicles themselves, it is not unheard of that other weapons associated with vehicles get involved in the fracas, such as tire irons, jack handles, hurled bottles, and the like. While the event that sparks the incident may be trivial, in every case there exists some reservoir of anger, hostility, or frustration that is released by the triggering incident.

One has to realize that the act of 'road rage' cannot be seen as an isolated incident or a series of incidents. In fact, I am suggesting that other social and psychological factors play a role, to differing degrees, in the ultimate manifestation of the behaviors. Some may be from tense domestic situations and other frustrations that come from daily living and working in a developing society.

My personal observations of aggressive driving over the years have identified gender differences with respect to the expression of aggressive driving in society. As a motor car driver for 50 years, I have seen aggressive women drivers tailgating, flashing headlights, obscene gestures, deliberate blocking of other vehicles and verbal abusing the perceived offender. If we ratio-

nally think about the causes of aggressive driving and road rage, we will all realize that in reality, they are minor misunderstandings that are perceived and interpreted by other drivers as aggressive, aversive, or directed at them. I believe the main cause of road rage reaction is frustration, which is followed by emotional arousal that separates the angry driver from his/her usually cognitive control and appropriate nice-guy behavior.

In most instances, the aggressive driver is already primed for aggressive or violent action due to an incident, or a combination of incidents that has/have taken place before entering the vehicle.

This may be anything from as a quarrel with one's spouse or household member, some difficulty with superiors, colleagues or subordinates on the job, or problems making financial ends meet; but what is important to understand is that any number of previous events can contribute to arousal and anti-social behavior. Further, the stimulus that might set off the aggression is the behavior of another driver, where the motor vehicle is the available weapon. The scenario creates the necessary components for a negative effect and appropriate stimuli for aggression, and as such, drivers in these positions react with rage.

My question to the reader is; Why do some people behave aggressively when frustrated, while others change their tactics? It has been argued that the rudiments of aggression are initially acquired by observing aggressive models or on the basis of direct experience; aggression is then gradually refined and maintained by reinforcement. People may have an aggressive behavior pattern, but may rarely express this, given it has no functional value or it is not condoned by significant others in their social environment. A living example is a parent who is a driver taking his/her children to school but not wearing a seatbelt or not obeying the highway code by trying to beat the amber light before it turns red. This behavior may in the future be imitated by the child who may be predisposed to such

behavior in the future. Thus, we all have the responsibility to lead by example, and in this case, by following the road rules and curbing our desire to work ourselves into emotional states that encourage road rage.

Valentine Smith (PhD)

Senior Fellow