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HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT DRIVING?

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCALE FOR APPREHENSIVE DRIVING TO MEASURE DRIVING-RELATED ATTITUDES IN NOVICE DRIVERS.

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Background: Impairments related to autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) can pose limits on daily living skills. One example relates to driving, which allows autonomy and permits maintenance of social- and work-related contacts. Research regarding ASD and driving has been steadily increasing in the past years. Most studies however focus on difficulties they might experience with the execution of the driving task. Meanwhile, research suggest that there are additional barriers related to driving. For instance, a previous study investigating viewpoints of individuals with ASD reported anxiety as an important barrier (Chee et al., 2014). Although several driving anxiety measures exist, none specifically focus on novice drivers. Furthermore, driving apprehension might not only be present during the drive itself but also in phases preceding driving (e.g., getting ready to drive). Finally, it is possible that novice drivers are reluctant to report their feelings, making parents important sources of information as they usually play a large role in the process of learning how to drive.

Objectives: The aim of the present study was to develop a parent questionnaire measuring their child's attitudes towards driving, allowing to compare whether novice drivers with ASD are more apprehensive towards driving than a control group.

Method: The 18-item (1-4 answering category) Scale for Apprehensive Driving (SAD), to be filled in by parents, was developed to measure positive and negative attitudes towards driving during three phases: 'thinking about driving', 'preparing to drive', and 'while driving'. Considering that emotions can be expressed cognitively, behaviorally and physically, questions were developed to tap each dimension. The questionnaire was completed by a group of parents of novice drivers (age range= 15-24), who earned their learners permit, without (n= 98) and with ASD (n= 66). Reliability analyses were executed per group, after which a 2x2 ANOVA (Valence: total positive, total negative; Group: control, ASD) was conducted to determine whether the ASD group reported more negative attitudes compared to the control group.

Results: Correlations between positive and negative items showed the expected direction for both the control ($r = -.39$, $p = .00$) and the ASD ($r = -.65$, $p = .00$) group. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was also high for both the control ($\alpha = .85$) and the ASD ($\alpha = .90$) group. A significant interaction effect of Valence*Group ($F = 92.58$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 p = .20$) indicated a difference in the reported attitudes between the control and ASD group. Further analyses, indicated that the control group reported more positive attitudes ($F = 203.16$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 p = .68$, $\mu Pos = 18.67$, $\mu Neg = 7.00$), while the ASD group reported more negative attitudes ($F = 3.71$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 p = .058$, $\mu Pos = 10.73$, $\mu Neg = 13.30$).

Conclusion: The results showed that the ASD group was less positive towards driving when compared to a control group. As driving apprehension could pose an important barrier for driving independently, future research should take this factor into account.