**Road traffic deaths and injuries: a cultural explanation**

22 November 2011

Cardiff researchers have discovered that culture and the attitudes of road users towards risk are fundamental in explaining road traffic safety in the UK and around the world.

The research compared rates of death and injury caused by road incidents with the willingness to follow the rules across different countries.

The results found that those countries with a high level of ‘corruption’ (i.e. a measure of the population’s non-compliance towards rules) had higher rates of road traffic deaths and injuries.

The implications of these findings according to the researchers - Dr Peter Wells, Cardiff Business School and Research Associate at the ESRC Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (BRASS), and Professor Malcolm Beynon, also of Cardiff Business School - are that an understanding of the rules and the development of safer vehicles, do not necessarily lead to safer outcomes.

Most road traffic incidents are mainly attributable to human error and taking unnecessary risks.

For instance in the UK, the research found that despite being one of the safest countries in the world for drivers, pedestrians, cyclists and other road users; culturally there are distinct high-risk, rule averse behaviours among certain social groups.

For example, young men who steal cars in order to go ‘joy riding’ or ‘airbag surfing’, and the so-called ‘born-again’ bikers who return to using a motorbike after some years of absence. Both groups have a notably higher mortality than average.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), if present trends continue, road traffic deaths and injuries are projected to become the third-leading contributor to the global burden of disease and injury by 2020.

The research also explored the social meaning of owning a car and the implications of increasing numbers of vehicles on the road.

"Over time the cultural position of the car has changed, with a stronger emphasis on the car as a protected personal space within which to safely traverse a hostile urban environment." Dr Wells commented.

However, the growing use of the car has cumulatively resulted in social dysfunction because it has resulted in the contemporary crisis of road traffic deaths and injuries

The outcomes of the research suggest that campaigns to change `hearts and minds', among all categories of road users are at least as important as engineering changes to vehicles and advances in safety technology.

"Putting legal frameworks in place is clearly a starting point and having the resources to enforce such frameworks is also important.

"However, our research suggests that road traffic safety is fundamentally explained by the attitudes of road users, and hence it is a battle for hearts and minds.

We need to understand a lot more about how different cultures and sub-cultures engage with motor vehicles, and what the consequences are for road traffic deaths and injuries" Dr Wells added.

This week marks national Road Safety Week (21-27 November 2011) founded by Brake, the national road safety charity.

The Week aims to heighten awareness of the carnage on the roads caused by needless deaths and injuries. <http://www.roadsafetyweek.org.uk/>

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**Notes to editors**

**1. A copy of the paper is attached.**

Peter Wells, Malcolm J Beynon. ‘Corruption, automobility cultures, and road traffic deaths: the perfect storm in rapidly motorizing countries?’ *Environment and Planning* A 2011, volume 43, pages 2492 – 2503. DOI: 10.1068/a4498

Please click the following link to watch a video of Dr Wells talking about the research in detail: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26Ldoq4LfS0>

**2. Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (BRASS)**

BRASS is an ESRC funded interdisciplinary research centre based at Cardiff University combining expertise from the Business School, the Law School and the School of City and Regional Planning. The centre pursues high quality, interdisciplinary social science research and engagement with research users to create knowledge and tools that will promote more sustainable stakeholder relationships amongst and within businesses, society and the environment.

[www.brass.cf.ac.uk](http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk/)

**3. Cardiff Business School**

Cardiff Business School is widely recognised as one of the leading business and management schools in the UK, currently ranked 4th in the Research Assessment Exercise. Its faculty consists of 260 members with expertise in accounting, finance, economics, marketing, strategy, human resource management, and logistics and operations. For more information visit: [www.cf.ac.uk/carbs](http://www.cf.ac.uk/carbs)

**Further information**

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