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"We've got bigger fish to fry…" Key Informant Perspectives on Hoon Driving in Victoria, Australia

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Abstract

Nuisance driving, involving excess speed, loss of tyre traction, and/or the production of excessive smoke and noise (referred to in Australia as 'hoon driving'), is typically problematised as reckless and dangerous. Local councils and government agencies have implemented specific deterrent- and enforcement-focused responses. However, there is a limited body of evidence regarding the specific harms associated with hoon driving. This article draws from a multi-modal study initiated by Victoria's Department of Justice and Community Safety. It sets out findings from interviews with key informants (N=34) from state government; local councils; emergency services; and driving-focused agencies, programs and organisations. These interviews examined informants' perceptions and experiences of hoon drivers, why they do it, and the harms associated with it. Within a media and legislative context that increasingly demonises hoon drivers and positions hoon driving as inherently dangerous, key informants demonstrated understanding of nuance with respect to specific harms. This included the need to differentiate between fear and perceptions of potential harm, and actual risk and harms. A better understanding of why people engage in these activities could support more creative approaches (to deter and/or more appropriately enable hoon driving), which are place-based, community-specific, and which could more effectively prioritise and address concerns.

Keywords: Nuisance driving; hoon driver; boy racer; thrill seeking; community harms; anti-social behaviour; car cruising.

Introduction

'Hoon' and 'hooning' are commonly used in Australia as labels for problematic or nuisance driving, typically involving excess speed, loss of tyre traction, and/or the production of excessive smoke and noise (Clark et al., 2011; Department of Transport and Planning [DTP] Victoria, 2023a; Leal, 2010; Watson-Brown et al., 2022). The scope of hoon driving is broad and can embody a range of irresponsible and potentially dangerous uses of a motor vehicle. This can include intentional driving acts, such as street racing, time or speed trials, burnouts or donuts, fishtails, wheel spinning, cruising or lapping, rolling roadblocks, and drifting and other skids (Leal et al., 2007, 2009; Newitt, 2012; Thake et al., 2011). In New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK), and Canada, terms such as 'boy racer' and 'stunt driving' are more commonly used (Falconer & Kingham, 2007; Lumsden, 2013; Meirambayeva et al., 2014; Yildirim-Yenier et al., 2015).

Hoon driving is typically problematised, by governments, police, and the broader community, as reckless and dangerous, with specific deterrent- and enforcement-focused responses implemented by local councils and law enforcement agencies (Gee Kee et al., 2007; Leal et al., 2007; Newitt, 2012; Thake et al., 2011). In the Australian state of Victoria, in which the current study was conducted, the Road Safety Act (1986) and the Crimes Act (1958) cover conduct such as drink driving, speeding, and lack of attention as well as deliberately causing a vehicle to skid, smoke, or make excessive noise. The Vehicle Impoundment and Other Amendments Act (2005) targeted problematic driving more broadly. These provisions cover careless and dangerous driving involving intentional loss of traction, failure to maintain proper control of a vehicle, and driving more than 45 kilometres per hour over the speed limit. The Road Safety Amendment (Hoon Driving) Act (2010) strengthened and extended vehicle forfeiture provisions and increased the maximum penalty for hoon driving offences to up to two years in custody (Victoria Police, 2025). Hoon driving is positioned as a notable concern that requires, and has received, substantial legislative and policing responses. However, there is a limited body of evidence exploring the specific harms associated with it.

This is one of three articles that report key findings from a multi-modal study funded by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) in response to an increasing media and police focus on hoon driving. Each article draws from specific data sources to address different aspects of the study. This includes an exploration of hoon driver motivations and reasons for hoon driving, and consideration of what would deter them; an examination of hoon driver perceived risks and harms; and an analysis of the perspectives of those whose role requires them to respond to and/or prevent hoon driving (this article). Both of the hoon driver-focused papers, which are currently under peer review, draw from direct engagement with hoon drivers via a survey, focus groups, and soundbite interviews. This article sets out findings from interviews with key stakeholders across Victoria and examines their experiences of hoon drivers, why they perceive people engage in hoon driving, and the harms associated with it. Stakeholder interviews, also referred to as key informant interviews, can offer rich insights into specific issues (Pahwa et al., 2023; Payne & Payne, 2004), and participant selection typically reflects their organisational, policy, and/or practical expertise (Marshall, 1996). The interviews for this study centre the perspectives of key decision-makers and stakeholders across Victoria, with participants drawn from state government; local councils; emergency services; and driving-focused agencies, programs, and organisations. This article does not detract from the importance of engaging directly with those who participate in hoon driving, whose perspectives are reported separately.

Research Context

Australian and international research confirms that hoon driving is dominated by young men, typically aged between 17 and 25 years (Amit et al., 2016; Daigle et al., 2014; DTP Victoria, 2023b, 2023c; Leal et al., 2007; Watson-Brown et al., 2022). In a multi-jurisdictional review, Voogt et al. (2014) associated various risky driving behaviours (including hoon driving and street racing) with males aged under 26 years. Sensation-seeking motivations, such as excitement and fun, have been linked to hoon driving (Graham & White, 2007; Harbeck & Glendon, 2013; Hughes, 2018). These motivations are reflected in other research that has engaged directly with hoon drivers (e.g., Clark et al., 2011; Falconer & Kingham, 2007; Harbeck & Glendon, 2013; Hughes, 2018). In Clark et al.'s (2011) study with drivers whose vehicles had been impounded under Victoria's vehicle impoundment provisions, 53% of participants highlighted feelings of enjoyment and thrill as key benefits of hoon driving. Experiencing an adrenaline rush, earning a reputation from peers, and/or a sense of belonging and identity were also noted as motivators. Falconer and Kingham (2007) engaged with boy racers in New Zealand and identified the importance of self-expression, showing off among friends, socialising, experiencing a rush, and escaping boredom. Studies that have explored hoon culture from the perspectives of the drivers are able to generate essential meaning from their knowledge and experiences, and help to increase understanding of key behavioural motivations and relevant group processes (Armstrong & Steinhardt, 2006). Centring the experiences of hoon drivers can also help to inform potential ways in which to respond to and/or prevent these driving behaviours (Harbeck & Glendon, 2018; Palk et al., 2010; Scott-Parker, 2012).

Despite the positive motivations shared by hoon drivers, community perceptions tend to frame hoon driving as a form of anti-social behaviour (DTP Victoria, 2023a, 2023b). While personal experience can play a role, community perspectives are also informed by news media reporting, with problematic driving a common focus. In 2024, Australian news reports detailed how communities are experiencing a "spree of hooning" (Li, 2024, para. 4), with reference to "imbecilic actions" which are creating "simmering anger" (Scully, 2024, paras. 8, 1). Earlier in 2024, amid reports of suburban streets being turned into speedways, Victoria's Road Policing Assistant Commissioner Glenn Weir described hoon driving behaviours as "garbage" (Swain, 2024, para. 3). Such sentiments can translate into specific community concern, prompting councils and governments to initiate actions in response. For example, in 2023, Bayside Council in New South Wales trialed weekend shutdowns of a local street used by hoon drivers as a "grand runway" (Bolger, 2022, para. 6). In Queensland, Moreton Bay Council and the Queensland Police Service initiated a trial of a tyre shredding road treatment across two intersections to prevent hoon driving (City of Moreton Bay, 2022).

Official responses to hoon driving tend to centre perceived risks and associated harms. As an example, the Victoria Police website (2025) frames the state's anti-hoon provisions as "making roads safer and reducing road trauma". However, there is limited evidence of an explicit link between hoon driving and heightened road safety risks. Road crashes that lead to serious injury or damage are rarely attributed to specific hoon driving behaviours (Clark et al., 2011; Leal, 2010; Meyer et al., 2024; Watson-Brown et al., 2022). Speeding, general inattention, tiredness, inexperience, and drink/drug driving are the primary driver-induced causes of road crashes (Queensland Government, 2005; Queensland Police Service, 2024; Road Sense Australia, 2023). In Victoria, the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) collates annual road crash data and records contributory factors such as speed, not wearing a seatbelt, high blood alcohol levels, and distraction-related causes (TAC, n. d.). The TAC does not report hoon-specific driving acts. This may reflect inconsistent definitions of what constitutes hoon driving, or it may confirm the relatively minor role played by hoon driving in road crashes. In an examination of 848 street racing and associated risky driving offences in Queensland, only 3.7% resulted in a crash (none were fatal), with most being single-vehicle collisions involving a fixed object (Leal & Watson, 2011).

Despite limited evidence of tangible safety risks directly associated with hoon driving, governments and police in Victoria and other Australian jurisdictions continue to push for increased powers to respond to, and deter, hoon drivers. In 2023, amendments to Queensland's Summary Offences Act (2005) were framed as the toughest hoon driving penalties in Australia (Mulach, 2024). The incumbent Police Minister promoted the provisions by directly linking hoon driving with risk: "If you behave in an anti-social manner and put the lives of others and yourself at risk you will be targeted relentlessly by police. … Life is precious. … Too many lives are lost on our roads" (Queensland Government, 2023, Quotes attributable to Police Minister Mark Ryan). In Victoria, a recent focus has been the introduction of penalties for people who watch or who film hoon driving activities. Watson-Brown et al. (2022) acknowledged spectators as a prime motivator for hoon driving, by creating an audience to be impressed. Since 2018, local law mechanisms[1] have been used by a handful of councils across Victoria to introduce bystander infringement penalties. The local law provisions enable substantial fines to be issued to those watching hoon driving events. Some councils have reported notable success in eliminating group-based hoon driving events (Watson-Brown et al., 2022, p. 35). However, these behaviours do not necessarily stop — displacement is a probable (but currently unquantified) outcome, as the gatherings move to other locations with less stringent provisions.

The introduction of anti-hoon driving provisions commonly occurs as a reactive response to high-profile hoon driving incidents or to a heightened media focus on hoon driving. In Victoria, the Vehicle Impoundment and Other Amendments Act (2005) followed Operation Stoker, a widely publicised Victoria Police initiative that led to 474 charges for driving offences (Perry & McGillian, 2008). The rationale for much of the hoon driving policy across Australia, and the associated legislative changes, is presumptive and appears to reflect political expedience rather than drawing from empirically informed need and evaluation-focused recommendations (Clark et al., 2011). In a report commissioned for Victoria's Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), Watson-Brown et al. (2022) recommended better co-ordination and collaboration between councils, government, and police; consideration of the cost effectiveness and sustainability of hoon driving-focused solutions, and of the associated risk of displacement; and stronger community engagement. As such, it is important to obtain the views of key Victorian stakeholders who are tasked with responding to hoon driving on the ground (e.g., emergency services), at a community level (e.g., local councils), and from a policy perspective (e.g., government departments). This article examines four research questions: [1] Who are hoon drivers? [2] Why do hoon drivers participate in this activity? [3] Where and when does hoon driving occur? [4] What are the consequences of hoon driving?

Research Method

The DJCS specified a focus on two particular categories of hoon driving: [1] those who attend non-lawful organised gatherings to participate in street racing; speed trials; and/or behaviours such as donuts, burnouts, drifting etc. [2] those who engage in behaviours such as donuts, burnouts, drifting etc., on a spur-of-the-moment basis, typically individually or with others in the vehicle. In referring to these categories, the terms 'organised event' and 'spur of the moment' are used. The DJCS specifically excluded other behaviours which could sit within a broader definition of hoon driving, including driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, general speeding, inattention, and/or failure to obey road rules. Key informants were reminded to answer in relation to the two specified categories, rather than broader conceptions of hoon driving. However, the potential for scope creep into other types of problematic driving is acknowledged with respect to the perspectives shared. Ethical approval for the project was provided by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee [2023-238].

Procedure

Key informants (n=34) were recruited from councils across Victoria; youth services; VicRoads (the government agency managing Victoria's vehicle licensing and registration services); DTP; DJCS; safe driver programs; emergency services, for example, Country Fire Authority (CFA), Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), and State Emergency Service (SES); and other organisations and services that engage with drivers and driving, including occupational therapy (OT) assessors, who evaluate a person's ability to drive, and organisers of key motoring events in Victoria. An invitation to participate, along with a Plain Language Statement, was sent via email to all local councils, relevant government departments and agencies, emergency services, and other key informant groups, using publicly available contact information. Interviews took place between September 2023 and February 2024. All interviews were conducted online (via Zoom or equivalent) by the lead researcher. The interviews were semi-structured, and questions aligned with the overall project research questions. Any emergent themes or issues were also explored. Each interview took between 30 and 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission, and interviewees were invited to review and approve their transcript before it was de-identified.

Analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed using codebook thematic analysis, with the data uploaded to NVivo (version 14). A single researcher (SK) coded the data, and codes were inductively refined to allow key content and themes to be confirmed (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

All interviewees were anonymised, and pseudonyms are used alongside any direct quotations. Key informants were categorised by cohort type, with smaller cohorts aggregated to prevent inadvertent identification. As this part of the study focused on the role-based perspectives of participants, additional demographic characteristics, such as age, race, and gender, were not collected. We acknowledge this as a potential limitation of this research. Table 1 summarises the key informant types and associated pseudonyms.

Table 1

Key Informant Interviews — Informant Type and Associated Pseudonym Codes

Key Informant Type	Pseudonym prefix	Numerical Identifiers
Local councils (city and shire), DTP, DJCS *	GOV	1–20
Associated government agencies (e.g., VicRoads, CFA, SES, FRV)	AGENCY	1–6
Motoring organisations, safe driving programs, OT assessors	DRIVE	1–8
TOTAL		**34**

*Key informants from local councils and government departments were included in the same category, given their policy, law, and decision-making focus and responsibilities.

Key Findings

Who are Hoon Drivers?

Key informant responses explored what hoon driving entails, and the perceived gender and age of hoon drivers.

Activity Type

When asked what constitutes hoon driving (and, by association, a hoon driver), key informants discussed general problematic driving (i.e., anti-social, risk-taking acts); organised and collective gatherings; and/or individual or spontaneous acts:

> It's just mindless, thoughtless, active stupidity. (Agency 3)

> I think more broadly it's really around dangerous behaviour. (Gov 1)

> One of the greatest issues around hoon driving is what it means to you versus what it means to me or to everybody else in the community. Everybody has their own perception of what a hoon is. Is that somebody who cut them off in the traffic this morning? Is that somebody who's doing burnouts? What is it? (Gov 20)

Key informants were then directed by the interviewer to focus their responses on the two specific categories of hoon driving of relevance to this research (organised events and spur-of-the-moment activities).

Gender and Age

Table 2 summarises perspectives relevant to consideration of who hoon drivers are.

Table 2

Key Informant Interviews: Who are Hoon Drivers?

	Agency (*n*=6)	**Drive (*n*=8)**	**Gov (*n*=20)**	**TOTAL (*n*=34)**
Male	6	5	12	**23**
Mixed genders		1	2	**3**
Aged under 30 years	6	6	12	**24**
Older/Mixed ages		1	7	**8**

Key informants perceived that hoon drivers are predominantly male. Three noted that a mixed gender profile was more common among spectators and passengers than drivers.

Most also noted that those participating in hoon driving are likely to be aged under 30. Seven key informants drew attention to older or more varied age groups engaging in hoon driving:

> The older ones in their mid-30s, for example, they're just not growing out of that. (Gov 6)

> A lot of these guys are 45 years old, which is amazing. (Gov 17)

Why Do Hoon Drivers Participate in This Activity?

The most commonly perceived motivations for hoon driving are set out in Table 3, by key informant type. Each is then briefly addressed along with some illustrative quotations.

Table 3

Key Informant Interviews — Why Hoon Drivers Participate in Hoon Driving Activities

	Agency (*n*=6)	Drive (*n*=8)	Gov (*n*=20)	TOTAL (*n*=34)
Sensation seeking	5	8	13	**26**
Showing off	*4*	*6*	*12*	*22*
Fun/Enjoyment	*2*	*3*	*3*	*8*
Thrill	*1*	*1*	*6*	*8*
Danger, risk, illicit activity	*2*	*1*	*7*	*10*
Social media coverage/Profile	3	2	12	**17**
Outlet for disenfranchised	1	2	2	**5**
Socialise/Make friends			5	**5**
Generational rite of passage		2	2	**4**

Note. Multiple responses captured.

Sensation Seeking

Various types of sensation seeking were prominent as perceived motivations for and/or benefits of hoon driving. This is further categorised into four sub-themes.

Showing Off

A perceived desire to show off to others — collectively and/or individually — was the most commonly shared motivation:

> It's a group mentality, and they all get each other going and just do crazy stuff … showing off. (Agency 5)

> There's a lot of impressing somebody else, or … there's a lot of just wanting to prove you're good at something, a mastery kind of behaviour. (Gov 15)

Fun/Enjoyment

The enjoyment that participants derive from hoon driving was acknowledged, whether it be from the social factors, speed, noise, and/or other sensory experiences:

> People do it because they enjoy the buzz of the loud engine, the throb of the car or the bike … I think just the personal pleasure of being in a powerful vehicle is something that is appealing to some people. (Agency 2)

> They just do it because they think it's fun. (Drive 5)

Thrill

Allied to the enjoyment was the perceived thrill of hoon driving, related to a physiological response to the adrenaline and/or excitement from the encouragement of others:

> It's the thrill of it … the illusion of control over something that's high-powered. (Agency 6)

> It's the adrenaline that they get from being in control. (Drive 8)

> There are the thrill seekers, there's the people that are literally doing it because they get a rise out of it. (Gov 2)

Danger, Risk, and Illicit Activity

A small number of key informants identified the risks of legal consequences and/or the illicit nature of hoon driving as reasons why people might participate:

> It's almost risk and reward. ... But when they get away with it … and they don't get caught by the cops, there's the reward and there's a buzz. (Agency 3)

> To see how close they can go to getting caught without getting caught. (Agency 6)

Notably, risk and danger were not expressed in terms of potential physical harm/s.

Social Media Coverage/Profile

The role and influence of social media, and the associated opportunity to raise personal profiles by sharing film and images of hoon driving activities, were regarded as another perceived key motivation:

> The reward is getting a buzz from how many likes on your video post. (Agency 3)

> Social media is a big part of that, people wanting to get close to film, probably notoriety associated with it … and get close to the action. (Gov 1)

Seven government key informants recognised that hoon driving is facilitated via social media as a communication tool, providing an intersection with a desire to be seen engaging in these activities:

> [Facilitation via social media is] quite a significant one … especially for the organised, collective type of hooning. I think that's how they organise themselves. (Gov 3)

> The police intel we've got is that it's a multilayered raft of pseudonyms and assumed names … they'll throw a Facebook message on and there is an emoji code … that lets the participants know exactly what's expected. (Gov 13)

Other Reasons/Motivations for Hoon Driving

A smaller number of key informants discussed hoon driving as a potential outlet for those who feel disenfranchised or otherwise frustrated, giving them something to do:

> I think it's the disenfranchised young males who simply don't have other outlets. (Drive 6)

> I think disenfranchisement is one key factor... in rural areas, for example, people might be bored, there's not much to do. This is just an activity that they can do together. (Gov 3)

Making friends was also noted and, for some, hoon driving was perceived as a generational rite of passage:

> I remember when that was something that you did, you had a bit of a hoon … it was your rite of passage as an 18-year-old when you got your licence. (Gov 5)

Where and When Does Hoon Driving Occur?

As a precursor to considering harms associated with hoon driving, key informants were asked where and when they believed hoon drivers participate in either of the specified activities. The most common responses are set out in Table 4, followed by some illustrative quotations.

Table 4

Key Informant Interviews — Where and When Hoon Driving Occurs

	Agency (*n*=6)	**Drive (*n*=8)**	**Gov (*n*=20)**	**TOTAL (*n*=34)**
Where?				
Industrial/Business	1	2	10	13
Residential	1	1	4	6
Car park	1	1	1	3
Highway/Freeway		1	2	3
Public park/Sports reserve			3	3
Rural			3	3
Wide roads			3	3
When?				
Evening/Night	3	1	11	15
Warmer weather	1		2	3

Industrial/business spaces were associated more with organised gatherings, often within the wide turning spaces available:

> Anywhere where there's not a lot of people around, but maybe factory areas and stuff like that, industrial areas. (Drive 7)

> Lots of light industrial areas … have that sort of big intersections [sic] for the trucks, and so they become vacant at night, and so they become a beautiful environment for [hooning] to happen. (Gov 14)

Residential locations were perceived to be used more for spur-of-the-moment activities:

> I've seen evidence of drifting or burnouts on many residential streets in the area. (Drive 6)

A smaller number of key informants also identified car parks, highways/freeways, public parks/sports reserves, rural areas, and unspecified wide roads as hooning locations. Specific activities at these locations varied:

> We do have a lot of public car parks that are used for burnouts. (Gov 12)

> We also have a segment of highway … there's a section of it … for drag racing. (Gov 9)

> We do get some rural hooning around farms, properties and on gravel roads as well. (Gov 5)

When asked when hoon driving was likely to occur, the most common response was during the evening/night, particularly at weekends, when there are fewer vehicles and people around:

> But stuff happens mainly after hours and it'll be Friday, Saturday, Sunday night. (Agency 4)

> Normally the reports are about vehicles late at night. (Gov 10)

Three key informants suggested warm weather may encourage hoon driving.

What Are the Consequences and Harms of Hoon Driving?

Key informant responses addressed consequences and harms across five core themes: harms to the community (further categorised into five sub-themes), physical harms, assertions of limited harms, associations or intersections with other harms, and legal consequences. Key informant responses relating to the core themes and relevant sub-themes are highlighted in Table 5, followed by a brief narrative and illustrative quotations for each.

Table 5

Key Informant Interviews — Harms Associated with Hoon Driving

	Agency (*n*=6)	Drive (*n*=8)	Gov (*n*=20)	TOTAL (*n*=34)
Community harms				
Debris and damage	3	3	19	**25**
Fear	4	2	17	**23**
Noise	1	2	6	**9**
Financial costs			5	**5**
Not a community concern	1		4	**5**
Physical harms				
Actual	1	4	7	**12**
Perceived		1	4	**5**
Limited overall harms	2		8	**10**
Associated harms				
Alcohol/illicit drugs	1		4	**5**
Anti-social behaviour			6	**6**
Theft	1		3	**4**
Limited associated harms			5	**5**
Legal consequences				
Interventions ineffective	1	5	5	**11**
Benefits of impounding	2		2	**4**
Disrespect/disregard	3	3	8	**14**
Fear of police	1		2	**3**
Positive relations with police		1	1	**2**

Note. Multiple responses captured.

Community Harms

Debris and/or Infrastructure Damage

The most significant community harm noted was the damage associated with hoon driving. This included shredded tyres and other debris, damage to road surfaces and other road infrastructure (such as kerbs, signs, and nature strips), as well as fences and other property:

> The rubber and debris and whatnot left on the roads. (Agency 6)

> Broken wheel rims by the side of the road … and damaged curb, like chips of concrete out. (Drive 6)

> We had lots of complaints of people turning up every day, finding burnt out tyres on the road, broken poles and signs, and huge amounts of just debris. (Gov 14)

> It's almost like putting mascara all over the road. (Gov 17)

Fear

A second common response focused on community fear in relation to hoon driving, primarily in the context of perceived safety:

> There is fear. Absolutely. I see people scared. … People who are simply terrified by the fact of the noise. People who are terrified by the fact of the blatant disregard. (Drive 6)

> If a resident is concerned about something and it's happening outside of their house, often it becomes much bigger than the actual risk because they're reminded of it every day and it becomes almost a stronger response. (Gov 12)

> The reality of crime and the perception of crime is quite different. I think hoon driving feeds into people's perceptions of … whether or not their community is safe. The noise that comes from the gathering of people … it has a big impact in terms of perceptions of safety. (Gov 20)

Noise

Engine, exhaust, tyres, and other noises associated with hoon driving were noted and were perceived to have a particular impact on the health of some residents, as well as being associated with the fear noted in the previous section:

> The communities were more upset by the noise. (Gov 2)

> It's the noise from their [the community] perspective and it's impacting their health and wellbeing. (Gov 16)

Financial Costs

Key informants acknowledged the financial costs associated with debris left and damage caused by hoon driving. For some local councils, particularly those experiencing large, organised gatherings, the costs were reported to be significant:

> If we get a big hoon event, we're at least sending out three or four staff members to clean up rubbish from the side [of] the road. We're sending out probably a street sweeper to clean the rubber residue from the road … and then we're sending out sign crews to fix any infrastructure that's been damaged as a result … anecdotally it was running to tens of thousands of dollars every year … purely cleaning up after these events. (Gov 13)

> It became a problem because our cleaning crew, the road sweepers, were going there every day, or every period, and so it became like, 'well, we're spending a lot of money on this.' (Gov 14)

Not a Community Concern

When asked about general community perceptions of hoon driving, perspectives drew from council community surveys documenting local issues of importance. However, only five key informants indicated a belief that the community is not particularly concerned about hoon driving, either because it was not occurring in their specific area or it was only happening in small pockets within a community:

> Most people would understate how bad they think hoon driving is, only simply because most people are in a lucky position that on their daily routine, they don't get to witness it. (Agency 3)

Physical Harms

Those who commented on the physical harms addressed actual harms of which they were aware and/or the perceived risk of harms — for those in the cars, for those watching, and for anyone in the vicinity:

> I see them only one step away or one action away from a serious motor vehicle crash leading from burnouts, drag racing and poor behaviour. (Agency 4)

> Well, somebody could be killed for a start, that's the biggest thing. (Drive 7)

> Oh, there's a huge risk of loss of life and injury to people … the bystander issue I think is a big one. (Gov 20)

Limited Overall Harms

Ten key informants perceived there to be limited harms. They highlighted that instances of hoon driving leading to physical harm were rare and that the perceived risk and fear from within the community were disproportionate to the actual harms associated with hoon driving. These perspectives acknowledged the limited evidence that hoon driving is particularly dangerous and that other forms of risky driving, such as speeding and inattention, are generally more harmful:

> The truth is … we don't actually see a lot of deaths and fatalities from this activity. So, it's kind of not a key priority for us. … We've got bigger fish to fry. (Gov 2)

> Do they actually cause that much harm? ... it's one thing to have community anxiety about something, because instinctively they think that there's a problem and another thing to have hard data that says, well actually some people get killed at these events or they promote a culture of reckless driving out in the general public and there's a tangible, measurable link between the two and the rising road toll and somehow those things are connected. But if they're not, then is spending a lot of money on enforcement against these events the right use of public money? (Gov 4)

> It's very rare that I'll see hoon driving as one of the reasons that [a] crash happened. (Gov 12)

Associated Harms

There were mixed perspectives regarding the extent to which other potentially harmful behaviours are associated with hoon driving/drivers. Five key informants indicated there may be an intersection between alcohol and/or illicit drug use and hoon driving:

> What I've been exposed to has been either alcohol or drug affected. (Agency 5)

Three did not perceive such an association (Drive *n*=1; Gov *n*=2) and indicated an expectation that hoon drivers would not wish to exacerbate their situation by being found unfit to drive:

> What I've seen is people's attitude is, 'well, if I'm going to be done, then why stack everything on top of each other? I might as well at least be sober if I'm going to be done for on street hoon activity.' (Drive 6)

> I actually didn't really notice anything. I didn't even notice alcohol, which is surprising, when many other places with that many people you would expect it there. (Gov 15)

Six government key informants addressed the potential association between hoon driving and general anti-social behaviour:

> And any time you get a large group of people congregating in an area with no one in authority or responsible for it, they will damage other infrastructure that's nearby. (Gov 11)

Four key informants speculated whether theft may be a related behaviour, particularly theft of cars or tyres:

> So, police often say, 'I don't know how they can afford the tyres.' And I said, 'well, they're not affording the tyres, they're stealing the tyres or they're stealing the wheels or they've got wheels set up for that.' (Gov 6)

Five key informants addressed what they perceived to be a limited intersection between hoon driving and other problematic behaviours:

> I don't think the same people that are hooning are the same people that are committing other crimes, to be honest. … I would say on the whole, they are people that are really enthusiastic about cars and have fun with their cars. (Gov 1)

> We didn't really get a lot of people suggesting that that [hoon driving and other anti-social behaviour] was a common thing. (Gov 2)

Legal Consequences

Key informants shared their perspectives on the potential legal consequences associated with hoon driving: fines, vehicle impound/destruction, and/or formal driving charges.

Effectiveness of Interventions

Views questioning the effectiveness of current provisions were the most common, with a general perception of limited legal harms for hoon drivers:

> Having threats of fines and all that sort of stuff is no, zero, absolute, they laugh at it. So yeah, there's no consequence for them. (Agency 4)

> I think they're going to be a group of people who skirt around, even being concerned about fines and rules and the police knocking on their window and that kind of stuff. (Drive 3)

> There's this idea that, 'I'm not going to get caught.' They're not going to be the person that gets caught, so those consequences don't really mean anything to them. (Gov 19)

Two agency key informants highlighted the benefits of crushing vehicles, with one noting that they had seen "men cry, because they've paid so much and worked so hard" (Agency 5). One agency key informant and two from government highlighted how, in their experience, impounding cars reduced hoon driving and had "a massive impact on [hoon drivers]" (Gov 20).

However, comments noting the limitations of both approaches were more prevalent, with key issues including individuals not caring about their car, the available options not being implemented enough (i.e., the risk of legal harm is too low), and workarounds reducing the actual legal harms associated with current provisions:

> These are not cars that are going to cause distress if they've been crushed. (Drive 6)

> Rightly or wrongly, my perception is, is that not enough cars get crushed … if the crushing is only 5 to 10%, then people will see that. 'Cool, there's my green light, I've only got [a] 1 in 10 chance of my car being crushed.' (Agency 3)

> If my son or grandson took my vehicle out, my vehicle would be seized and not theirs. (Gov 16)

Disrespect/Disregard of Legal Consequences

When considering the attitudes of hoon drivers towards the potential legal consequences, disrespect (for self and others) and/or general disregard of the legal risks were the most common responses from key informants:

> They don't care. They have no fear, they have no consequence. (Agency 4)

> They think it's a joke. Because they know that the police can't do anything to stop them from doing it, really. They'll just go around the corner and do it again. (Drive 7)

> They know too much about what the police capabilities are really. I don't think they're too worried. (Gov 15)

Police Relations

Three key informants indicated a certain level of fear of police, although they perceived this to be the result of other interactions with law enforcement, rather than hoon driving specifically:

> I guess it's an assumption about the police, that … they did this to my family, or they did that. So, there is already that negativity, I suppose, towards the police. (Agency 1)

Two key informants highlighted that the relationship with police can be beneficial. However, this was discussed from a more hoon-adjacent perspective, rather than directly in relation to hoon drivers or spectators (i.e., safe driving presentations by police in schools, police interactions with car enthusiasts, etc.):

> This event that took place that shut the[location redacted] down. ... Police had a major presence there and the question was asked very early on, 'do we shut the event down?' And the decision was made, no … if we shut it down, they're going to go everywhere. While they're here, we can control it. And the police were walking through the crowd looking at motors engines and sharing their love of cars as well. (Gov 13)

Discussion

This article examines perspectives shared by key stakeholders across Victoria, Australia, who respond to hoon driving on the ground, in the community, or at a policy level, with respect to four key research questions: [1] Who are hoon drivers? [2] Why do hoon drivers participate in this activity? [3] Where and when does hoon driving occur? [4] What are the consequences of hoon driving? These insights can be juxtaposed with perspectives offered by hoon drivers and community members who participated in an online survey, focus groups, and soundbite interviews, which are reported in two separate articles (citations pending). Collectively, these articles enhance understanding of why people engage in hoon driving and consideration of the most effective ways to respond: via prevention, accommodation, intervention/enforcement, law, and wider policy provisions.

In common with previous research (e.g., Amit et al., 2016; Clark et al., 2011; Daigle et al., 2014; DTP Victoria, 2023b, 2023c; Watson-Brown et al., 2022), the key informants in our study perceived hoon driving to be dominated by younger males. There was some recognition that women and girls are becoming more visible, primarily as spectators and/or passengers, and some acknowledgement of older drivers. It is not yet clear whether a changing demographic will affect the harms associated with hoon driving, or any of the responses to it. Demographic information collected when issuing penalties, such as fines and car impounds, could provide an avenue for further research in this space. Given that interviewees viewed hoon drivers as predominantly men, it is presumed that this informed the other perspectives offered, including discussion of the various reasons why people engage in hoon driving. This study did not explore whether motivations for engaging in hoon driving differ by participant gender, and this could be a focus for additional research.[2] Other studies have examined gender differences with

respect to driving-related risk taking and road crash prevalence (e.g., Elliott et al., 2006; Massie et al., 1997), but underpinning motivations have received little attention.

Key informants perceived various forms of sensation seeking as the most common motivations for hoon driving, including a desire to show off, enjoyment, thrill, and risks associated with its illicit nature. Other perceived reasons for participation related to social media presence, making friends, and as part of a generational rite of passage. These findings build upon previous research, such as Clark et al.'s (2011) study involving hoon drivers in Australia and Falconer and Kingham's (2007) work with boy racers in New Zealand. In a review of Australian literature, Graham and White (2007) found that hoon driving can reflect a desire to build or embed a personal identity, to enhance social status, to demonstrate skills, and to create a sense of belonging. Most of these earlier studies preceded the growth and widespread use of social media, as well as ready access to recording and upload facilities via mobile devices (Chaffey, 2025). While social media is used to facilitate and promote hoon driving events and individual activities, it is also increasingly used by police as a law enforcement tool (Fortin et al., 2023). This is another avenue for future hoon driving-focused research in Australia and internationally; for example, to explore how social media is used by law enforcement or to identify methods used by hoon drivers to shield their activities from police.

Within the sensation seeking theme, only a small number of key informants highlighted danger and the illicit nature of hoon driving as primary motivating factors. However, these more anti-social aspects of hoon driving are commonly represented within community concerns, often amplified by media reporting and associated police and legislative responses (see e.g., Bayside Council, 2024; Swain, 2024; Travers & Sheil, 2024). To understand how best to respond to hoon driving — through deterrent and/or enforcement activities — it is critical to explore the motivations of those who participate and to not draw solely from the perceptions and expectations of the non-hoon driving community. A separate article (currently under review) examines hoon driver perspectives that were derived from this project.

When considering hoon driving-related harms, specific community-focused harms perceived by the key informants included debris, damage, noise, and the consequential financial costs. The effects of these harms should not be diminished, but caution should be exercised if generalising from what are typically place-based specific harms to broader presumptions of safety. There was limited evidence of tangible physical harms resulting from the hoon driving activities examined in this study. Some key informants shared personal experiences related to hoon driving, but most highlighted the presumed risk and potential for physical harm. Key informants representing the emergency services had experienced very little physical harm that could be directly associated with the hoon driving behaviours that were the focus of this study. Other issues were far more prominent in the context of road safety, such as speeding and inattention. As one government key informant noted, "it's very rare that I'll see hoon driving as one of the reasons that [a] crash happened". These perspectives align with other Australian-based studies, where hoon driving-related physical harms are evident but limited (Clark et al., 2011; Gee Kee et al., 2007 Leal, 2010; Leal & Watson, 2011). In the context of road crash and offence data from Queensland, Leal et al. (2007) recognised community concern about hoon driving behaviours but concluded "there is limited empirical evidence of the road safety implications of these behaviours" (p. 9).

The preferred times and locations for hoon driving are likely to help to minimise physical harms and reduce the likelihood that more minor incidents will be reported. There was general agreement among the key informants that organised events primarily occur within industrial/business spaces, away from residential areas, and typically during the evenings, when few other people or vehicles are likely to be around. While spur-of-the-moment hoon driving was perceived to be more likely to take place within residential areas, which could create a higher level of risk, its predominance during the evenings again intersects with fewer people and other vehicles. However, regardless of the actual risks, the level of community fear perceived by key informants was notable. It is possible that this relates to broader perceptions of what constitutes hoon driving — the inclusion of speeding and other types of recklessness does heighten risk and is likely to amplify concern. It is also possible that community fear intersects with a cohort judgement about who engages in hoon driving, their presumed associations with other harmful behaviours, and widespread depictions of a "youth crime crisis" (Hickey & Wallis, 2023, para. 1; Sato, 2024). Further research should explore this perceived nexus within Australian and international jurisdictions.

Some key informants commented specifically on what they perceived to be potentially harmful behaviours associated with hoon driving, including intersections with alcohol and illicit drug use, other anti-social behaviour, and theft. Other key informants perceived little association, and this variation is reflected within existing literature. For example, there is mixed evidence of a link between hoon driving and alcohol use, with some research highlighting a connection (Knight et al., 2004; Smart et al., 2011; Wong, 2011), while other studies refute it (Armstrong & Steinhardt, 2006; Joelsson, 2014). Hoon drivers may be more likely to use their mobile phone and not wear a seatbelt whilst driving (Ramisetty-Mikler & Almakadma, 2016); engage in car theft; or use fraudulent vehicle registration plates, violence, or intimidation (Amit et al., 2016; Falconer & Kingham, 2007; Hall, 2021; Vingilis et al., 2011; Voogt et al., 2014). However, definitions of hoon driving are inconsistent —

with some studies applying a much broader scope — and available data is often drawn from non-Australian jurisdictions. In their evaluation of Victoria's Safe Driving Program, Meyer et al. (2024) pointed to a potentially more notable intersection between hoon driving and other serious offending behaviours. However, the Safe Driving Program is a court ordered intervention for people found guilty of specific hoon driving behaviours (Road Safety Act, 1986, Part 6AB). It is difficult to extrapolate from this more serious offender cohort to the broader community of hoon drivers. It is also not clear whether and to what extent other problematic behaviours may be (or are presumed to be) linked specifically with hoon driving events or incidents, or with those who engage in hoon driving. While not diminishing the links identified by Meyer et al. (2024), it is possible that community concerns again reflect a broader cohort judgement in relation to the dominant demographic engaging in hoon driving.

Key informants generally perceived the potential legal consequences of hoon driving, such as fines, vehicle seizures, and driving charges, as having a limited effect. There was a belief that hoon drivers may not care about their car (or may use a car that does not belong to them), that legal consequences are not used frequently or visibly enough to act as a sufficiently strong deterrent, that there are too many ways to circumvent the legal provisions, and/or that generally disrespectful attitudes undermine the potential effectiveness of any legal consequences. In group discussions with hoon drivers in Queensland (n=22), Leal et al. (2009) found that the threat of vehicle impound provisions was unlikely to change the behaviour of hoon drivers. In a second study, only a small reduction in hoon driving behaviours was noted for those whose vehicle had been impounded (Leal, 2010). This perceived lack of effectiveness is notable, particularly given the increasing focus on and scope of legislated enforcement provisions. Meyer et al. (2024) noted that the use of hoon driving-related bans and vehicle impound provisions has reduced in recent years, which may suggest that such penalties are working. However, there is insufficient evidence to discern whether any reduction in the use of such provisions reflects changes in driver behaviour or changes in enforcement practices. Once again, further research is required to better understand the nature of, and possible reasons for, any changes in responses to hoon driving within Australian and international jurisdictions.

Conclusion

This article shares important insights into the perceived motivations and harms associated with hoon driving in Victoria, Australia from the perspectives of those whose roles require them to respond to and/or prevent it. The findings have implications for the understanding of, and responses to, hoon driving across Australia and internationally. The key informant sample included representatives from government departments and agencies, local councils, emergency services, and driving-focused organisations, and the perspectives shared have implications for policy analysis, development, and ongoing evaluation. Within a media and legislative context that increasingly demonises and problematises hoon drivers and positions hoon driving as inherently dangerous, it is notable that the participants in this study demonstrated understanding of the nuance with respect to specific harms. This included the need to differentiate between fear and perceptions of potential harm, and actual risk and harms.

Key informants also identified some of the more positive reasons why people may engage in hoon driving. Appreciation of these reasons is essential to facilitate a balance between preventing and deterring hoon driving in locations where it may lead to heightened risk and annoyance and, where possible, appropriately enabling the activity for those who engage in it. The arguably not unreasonable view of those who engage in hoon driving is that the activity they enjoy could and should be appropriately enabled. Perhaps less contentiously, if there is a genuine intention to deter or to stop hoon driving, rather than perpetuating reactive responses that prioritise legal consequences, more understanding is required of why people engage in these activities and what the actual risks are. This may lead to more creative approaches with better outcomes, which more effectively address community concerns and perceived harms. The top-down law enforcement focus enables a rapid policing response to specific situations, but it positions hoon driving as a universal problem rather than one that is place-based and community-specific. Not every area experiences hoon driving in the same way; as one key informant noted, "we've got bigger fish to fry".

The variability in perceived hoon driving motivations and associated consequences highlights the importance of avoiding a one-size-fits-all response. For example, noise from hoon driving activities in a particular residential location can significantly affect the quality of life for local residents, and it is reasonable that efforts should be made to curtail problematic activities and preserve expectations of peaceful occupation. However, these efforts should first seek to understand the local context and specific motivations of those engaging in the hoon driving. This can increase the likelihood that responses are tailored to enable the greatest chance of success and to limit outcomes that may further demonise sections of the community.

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[1] Councils in Victoria are empowered to make local laws in response to community needs and concerns within a local context (Victoria State Government, 2025).
[2] The authors acknowledge the binary nature of the framing and analysis of gender in this study.

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