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"Shredded Rubber and Churned Up Grass or Whatever it Might Be …" Risks and Harms Associated With Nuisance (Hoon) Driving in Victoria, Australia

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Abstract

The term 'hoon' is commonly used in Australia in relation to certain types of nuisance driving. This article draws from a multi-modal study, initiated by Victoria's Department of Justice and Community Safety, which engaged directly with hoon drivers and the wider community to explore motivations for, and consequences of, hoon driving. The article examines reported and perceived risks and harms associated with two specific categories of hoon driving: unlawful organised gatherings and spur-of-the-moment stunts, such as donuts, skids, and burnouts. It reports findings from an anonymous online survey (n = 1,209), focus groups (n = 18), and soundbite interviews (n = 49).

There was limited evidence of a strong association between the hoon driving activities analysed in this study and tangible physical harms (i.e., reported crashes causing injury and/or property damage). But the perceived risk/s and potential for physical harm were emphasised repeatedly, particularly by non-hoon driver participants. Environmental and amenity-based harms were identified as more notable and enduring consequences, with attention drawn to noise, road damage, and general detritus. Those who engage in hoon driving generally perceived the level of enforcement and associated legal risks to be low.

The findings highlight the value and importance of engaging directly with hoon drivers to better understand their reported motivations and experiences and to help inform ongoing policy development and community responses more broadly, particularly in relation to perceptions of risk and harm.

Keywords: Nuisance driving; hoon driving; risky driving; police legitimacy; risks; harms; safety; noise.

Introduction

The terms 'hoon driver' and 'hoon driving' are commonly used in Australia as labels for certain types of nuisance driving (Department of Transport and Planning [DTP], 2023a; Leal et al., 2007; Watson-Brown et al., 2022). In New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK), and Canada, terms such as 'boy racer', 'stunt driving', and 'car cruising' are more common (Falconer & Kingham, 2007; Lumsden, 2014; Meirambayeva et al., 2014; Yildirim-Yenier et al., 2015).[1] In other jurisdictions, 'street racing', 'speed racing', 'drag racing', and 'risky driving' can be more typical (see, e.g., Daigle et al., 2014; Kar et al., 2018; Warn et al., 2004). Hoon driving can encompass a range of behaviours but, across Australia, it lacks a specific legal definition. Activities include street racing, time or speed trials, burnouts or donuts, fishtails, wheel spinning, cruising or lapping, rolling roadblocks, drifting and other skids, and can also encompass the use of motor vehicles in a manner that intentionally causes excessive noise and/or smoke (Folkman, 2005; Leal, 2010; Leal et al., 2009; Newitt, 2012). These driving behaviours can take place individually or collectively (Armstrong & Steinhardt, 2006), and they can be organised or spontaneous in nature (Warn et al., 2004). Broader conceptions of hoon driving can include speeding, tailgating, and lane jumping — framed collectively as driving behaviours that are intentional, aggressive, risky, and mostly illegal (Leal, 2010; Gee Kee et al., 2007). In Victoria, where the current study was conducted, general driving regulations are covered by provisions such as the *Road Safety Rules 2017*. More specific hoon driving behaviours are addressed within the *Road Safety Act 1986* (Vic) and the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic), and cover careless driving of a motor vehicle on a highway (careless is generally understood to mean lacking the care and attention of a reasonable driver; Victoria Legal Aid, 2026); improper use of a motor vehicle, in a way that causes the motor vehicle to lose traction; and using or allowing a motor vehicle to be used for racing or speed trials.

Hoon driving has received notable media and political attention, in Australia and internationally. As one example, Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) provisions — introduced in 2014 to enable local councils in England and Wales to address anti-social behaviour — are increasingly being implemented with specific nuisance driving prohibitions (see, e.g., Norwich City Council, 2023) (Heap & Farmer, 2026). Much of the media and political attention reflects perceived associations between hoon driving and a heightened risk of road crashes (Leal, 2010; Leal et al., 2007; Leal et al., 2010; Warn et al., 2004). In July 2025, a hoon driver gathering in the Chapel Street area of Melbourne was described by a Victoria Police spokesperson as "reckless and irresponsible" and by the local state parliamentary member as "completely unacceptable and put[ting] lives at risk" (McMillan & Ward, 2025). In research undertaken by the Victorian Government (DTP, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c), community members across the state reported concerns about the safety risks of hoon driving. However, there is limited empirical evidence to demonstrate a direct link between hoon driving activities, such as burnouts and donuts, and an increased road safety risk (Daigle et al., 2014; DTP, 2023a; Leal, 2010; Leal et al., 2007; Meyer et al., 2024).

In 2023, as part of its evidence-based Crime Prevention Strategy,[2] the Victorian Government initiated a three-phased project to examine hoon driving, its effects, and possible deterrents. The multi-modal study from which this article is drawn formed part of the first phase, which sought to engage directly with hoon drivers as well as representatives from the wider community. The overall study addressed seven research questions: (1) Who are hoon drivers? (2) Why do hoon drivers participate in this activity? (3) Where and when does hoon driving occur, and why are these locations chosen? (4) What crashes and injuries have hoon drivers witnessed, been involved in? (5) What fines, charges, impounds have they experienced and what were the impacts of these? (6) What are the attitudes of those who hoon toward police/legitimacy/procedural fairness? (7) What would deter people from hooning? This is one of three articles that report key findings from the study (Farmer et al., 2025a, 2025b),[3] and it specifically examines perceived and reported risks and harms associated with certain hoon driving behaviours.

Research Context

Australian research consistently finds hoon driving to be dominated by male participants aged between 17 and 25 years (DTP, 2023b, 2023c; Folkman, 2005; Leal et al., 2007; Watson-Brown et al., 2022). Similar findings are evident across international literature (see, e.g., Amit et al., 2016; Daigle et al., 2014; Kar et al., 2018). Hoon driving is typically framed within research as a socially problematic and disruptive community nuisance (Gee Kee et al., 2007; Leal et al., 2007; Newitt, 2012; Thake et al., 2011). A small number of studies have linked hoon drivers with alcohol and/or drug use; involvement in violence/property crime; and/or affiliations with peers who engage in substance misuse and other illegal activities (Begg et al., 2017; Fergusson et al., 2003; Vingilis et al., 2011). However, there is no strong evidence to support this anti-social framing. Despite this, the visible and audible nature of hoon driving and the participatory prominence of groups of young men fuel community perceptions and associated fear of lawlessness, social disorder, and risk. Drawing from the dominant demographic, media depictions of a stereotypical 'boy racer' feed and sustain this fear (Lumsden, 2014). In a Canadian study, Daigle et al. (2014) found that newspaper articles covering street racing typically portray sensationalised behaviour and a caricatured street racing villain — the speed-hungry young male. They suggest such media framing can shape public perceptions and influence political responses. Hoon driving stereotypes may also contribute to issues of distrust between police and the car enthusiast community.

For example, young drivers can feel targeted as troublemakers regardless of their involvement in any illegal driving behaviours (Armstrong & Steinhardt, 2006). In her study of 'boy racers' in Scotland, Lumsden (2014) examined the expanding scope of anti-social behaviour provisions. The discretionary use of dispersal orders and seizure of vehicle powers were found to target, stigmatise, and marginalise young drivers, and negatively impact police–driver relations. A more recent study by Heap and Farmer (2026) examined the use of PSPOs in England to control and deter driving behaviours associated with car cruising – but noted that the prevalence of the issues these orders are intended to address, as well as their specific effects, are currently unknown.

In an alternative perspective, Graham and White (2007) argue that the term 'hoon' and its association with young people misrepresents youth driving culture in Australia and overlooks its positive social motivations and broader social utility. Research that has engaged directly with hoon drivers has identified and confirmed a range of more positive features of hoon driving culture. These include fun and excitement, thrill seeking, self-expression, and socialisation (Clark et al., 2011; Falconer & Kingham, 2007; Watson-Brown et al., 2022). As well as providing enjoyment, for some participants hoon driving underpinned their personal identity and community standing (Clark et al., 2011; Falconer & Kingham, 2007; Farmer et al., 2025a). The potentially beneficial effects of this social capital and associated sense of community are typically not acknowledged within more official depictions, and condemnation, of hoon driving.

In a recent study in South Australia, Wundersitz and Raftery (2025) reported that 70% of fatal crashes and 93% of injury-causing crashes were attributed primarily to road transport system failures. In 48% of the fatal crashes and 72% of the injury-causing crashes, no specific problematic driving behaviours (e.g., speeding, drug or alcohol use, or intentional recklessness) were identified. The specific harms associated with, or caused by, hoon driving are difficult to gauge. Australian administrative data indicate very low numbers of hoon driving-related crashes that result in fatalities, serious injuries, or hospitalisations (Folkman, 2005; Watson-Brown et al., 2022). Leal and Watson (2011) examined 848 street racing and associated risky driving offences in Queensland: only 3.7% resulted in a crash, and none were fatal. In an examination of the effectiveness of the Safe Driving Program — a court-ordered behaviour change initiative in Victoria — Meyer et al. (2024) noted that crashes and serious injuries that can be linked directly to hoon driving behaviours occur in relatively small numbers. However, it can be difficult to obtain accurate data, due in part to varying definitions of hoon driving, a reliance on self-reported data (Fergusson et al., 2003; Rhodes & Pivik, 2011; Wong, 2011), and the limitations of documentation for hoon-related crashes within police records (Gee Kee et al., 2007; Vingilis & Smart, 2009). In a UK study, Rolison (2020) noted that most traffic-related incident reports, from police or other emergency responders, do not document contributory or causal factors unless a fatality has occurred and/or a detailed investigation has been undertaken. Road crashes that are directly linked to hoon driving behaviour are likely to be under-reported and under-recorded, particularly if incidents are more minor and/or where drivers may be wary of the repercussions of reporting (Watson-Brown et al., 2022). However, Leal (2010) suggests that the risks associated with hoon driving relate more to the driver than to the hoon driving itself. Those who engage in hoon driving are also more likely to commit other generally risky driving behaviours, including speeding, inattention, and using vehicles with defects or illegal modifications. This can lead to a higher number of traffic infringements and an increased risk of driving-related incidents among the demographic who engage in hoon driving. However, these incidents can also relate to other factors (such as driver inexperience) and are not necessarily directly associated with hoon driving activities (Leal, 2010; Leal et al., 2010). More broadly, driving-related harms are more likely to arise from other behaviours, such as general speeding, inattention, or inexperience, along with external factors such as road conditions and weather (Rolison, 2020).

Policy and operational responses to hoon driving typically emphasise the safety risks and focus on deterrence and enforcement to prevent hoon driving and to punish those who continue to engage in it. Victoria's *Vehicle Impoundment and Other Amendments Act 2005* (Vic) introduced vehicle seizures and forfeitures for hoon driving-related behaviours. These were then extended under the *Road Safety Amendment (Hoon Driving) Act 2010* (Vic), including a new maximum penalty for hoon driving offences of up to two years in custody (Victoria Police, 2025). In 2023, the Queensland Government amended the *Summary Offences Act 2005* (Qld), with a suite of hoon driver-focused fines, imprisonment, and vehicle forfeiture provisions labelled as the toughest in Australia (Queensland Government, 2023), particularly for organised group-based hoon driving activities. However, the extent to which an expectation of detection or apprehension will act as a deterrent for hoon drivers is unclear.[4] Bates and Anderson (2021) identified punishment avoidance — for example, via intentional displacement away from higher risk areas and engaging in behaviours in less visible locations — as common techniques employed by hoon drivers. Leal et al.'s (2009) earlier study of hoon drivers in Queensland confirmed that participants were more likely to actively avoid punishment than experience it. Punishment avoidance may then increase the likelihood of further hoon driving if it decreases the perceived risk and/or severity of punishment (Bates & Anderson, 2021; Stafford & Warr, 1993). Truelove et al. (2021) found that, where drivers did not expect consequences for their excess speed, this significantly predicted their likely engagement in speeding. This article is not examining responses to hoon driving (Farmer et al., 2025b draws on findings from this study in

relation to deterrence and prevention), but a policy and operational focus is relevant to the underpinning considerations and expectations of risk and associated harms.

Research Method

This article examines the risks and harms associated with hoon driving, using self-report data from an online survey, focus groups, and soundbite interviews. To inform consideration of relevant risks and harms, this article also explores who participates in hoon driving and the locations where hoon driving occurs.[5] At the request of the Department of Justice and Community Safety, this study specifically focused on two categories of hoon driving behaviour: (1) Those who attend non-lawful organised gatherings to participate in street racing, speed trials, and/or specific behaviours, such as donuts, burnouts, drifting, etc.[6] (2) Those who engage in specific behaviours, such as donuts, burnouts, drifting, etc. on a spontaneous or spur-of-the-moment basis, either individually or with others in the vehicle. In referring to these categories, the terms 'organised event' and 'spur of the moment' are used. Other behaviours which could sit within a broader definition of hoon driving were excluded, such as driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, speeding, inattention, or general failure to obey road rules. The online survey included visual and written descriptors of the specific behaviours of interest, and each were discussed with the focus groups and interview participants. However, it is acknowledged that some responses provided may include consideration of other risky driving behaviours.

Given its legal precarity, those who participate in hoon driving can be difficult to reach, and the project employed a range of data collection techniques. The multi-modal design sought to maximise participant reach and engagement, ensure the inclusion of multiple perspectives (particularly those of hoon drivers), enhance data richness, and support a comprehensive response to the research questions (see, e.g., Carter et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2022).

Ethical approval for the project was provided by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee [2023-238 and 2023-244], and data collection occurred during the second half of 2023. Survey respondents provided informed consent to participate via the survey landing page, which included a confirmation that they had read and understood the plain language statement describing the project, and that they were aged 16 years or over.[7] Focus group participants provided informed consent via written consent forms that were included with a written plain language statement. Consent was reconfirmed verbally at the start of each focus group. Soundbite interview participants provided verbal consent to participate and to confirm that they were aged 16 years or over and were given a plain language statement to take away. The soundbite interviews were brief, anonymous interactions that took place during motoring events, and it was not practical or appropriate to seek written consent. No soundbite interview participant details were recorded, and ethical approval for the project supported this streamlined approach to the provision of consent.

Procedure and Analysis

Online Survey

The online survey was completed anonymously using Qualtrics. The survey link and QR code were shared widely via project team member networks; social media — using a specially created project identity; email — to motoring organisations, mechanics, car body shops, etc. across Victoria, requesting onward sharing to their member/customer lists; and business card drops — to mechanics, car body shops, etc. within key urban areas across the state. Survey items included core demographic and cohort information. The survey questions displayed were then customised according to each respondent's stated experience as a hoon driver and/or spectator/passenger, or non-hoon driver. Questions explored who engages in hoon driving, the locations where hoon driving occurs, and specific harms and consequences of hoon driving.

The survey was open in September and October 2023 and elicited 1,682 responses. After excluding outliers, the average time to complete the survey was 13.34 minutes (SD = 7.61). Responses were removed if they were duplicates, notably incomplete, or gave rise to reasonable suspicion regarding their authenticity and/or reliability. Bot detection and other analytical functions available within Qualtrics were used to assist with this process. The final sample comprised 1,209 respondents. The survey data were examined using descriptive and chi-square analyses where appropriate.

Soundbite Interviews

With the permission of the organisers, soundbite interviews (n=49) were conducted at two legal motoring events, both of which featured stunt driving and other relevant activities: referred to as W (n=10) and S (n=39). The events took place in different parts of regional Victoria, with both locations rating in the mid-900s on the SEIFA scale.[8] Care was taken to approach, where

possible, a range of attendees by presenting age and gender, solo and group. To maximise engagement, the interviews were intentionally brief (with interactions typically lasting up to five minutes), personal information was not requested or recorded, and participants were not identifiable.[9] The questions drew from the seven project research questions (see endnote 5), and participants were able to answer in whatever way/s they preferred. With permission, each interview was audio recorded using a hand-held device, then transcribed and uploaded to NVivo (version 14). A single research assistant (KB) coded the transcripts, and identified, refined, and confirmed common themes grounded in the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Saturation was reached when no new themes could be generated from the data.

Focus Groups

Online survey respondents were invited to participate in a follow-up focus group via a final survey question. To ensure anonymity of the substantive survey, those who expressed interest were directed to a separate survey through which they submitted a contact email address. Two focus groups (n=18) were conducted — each structured around the seven core project research questions (see endnote 5) — and attendees were not identifiable. The focus groups were facilitated by two members of the project team (SK/AD) online (via Zoom), audio recorded (with the consent of all participants), and transcripts were uploaded to NVivo (version 14). Two members of the project team (RM/SK) independently coded a subset of the data and comparisons confirmed an 85% coding match: discrepancies were resolved through negotiation and refinement to achieve a consensus. A single researcher (SK) completed the coding, which was grounded in the research questions. Codes were inductively and iteratively refined, and themes were constructed and confirmed (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In common with the soundbite interviews, saturation was reached when no new themes could be generated from the data.

Limitations

The study focused on the Australian state of Victoria, but it is recognised that some survey respondents and focus group/soundbite interview participants may not live in the state. The recruitment methods sought to maximise participation, but the representativeness of the samples cannot be established, and all findings are situated within this limitation. The focus groups and soundbite interviews are intended to add richness to the survey data, but it is recognised that the cohorts differ. It is also acknowledged that the self-report data discerned from the hoon driver participants in this study may not be representative of all drivers who engage in hoon driving (Leal & Watson, 2011). Those who participate in hoon driving can be difficult to reach and fear of legal apprehension may have discouraged participation by members of the target population (Thake et al., 2011). The legal precarity of hoon driving behaviours may have led respondents and participants to provide socially desirable responses. It is also acknowledged that attendees at legal motoring events may differ from those who engage in illegal activities, although the soundbite interviews included clear admissions of hoon driving-aligned behaviours. The anonymity of the survey and soundbite interviews helped to mitigate participatory risks, but the potential limitations of these approaches are recognised. The predominance of male hoon driver survey respondents and male-presenting focus group and soundbite interview participants has limited gendered analyses and discussion. Due to the sample sizes within each cohort and across each hoon driving activity type, complex inferential analyses of survey data were not undertaken, in recognition of the risk of error and/or misleading results.

Respondent/Participant Summary

Online Survey

From the 1,209 accepted responses, 599 (49.5%) reported engaging in some form of hoon driving activity, 8% of whom only engaged with organised events, 43% only with spur-of-the-moment activities, and 49% with both. Analyses further delineated hoon respondents as driver only, passenger/spectator only, or both.[10] This is summarised in Table 1. Of the respondents who reported taking part in organised events, most were as a passenger or spectator only. There was a more balanced distribution for spur-of-the-moment activities. Non-hoon drivers accounted for 591 (49%) of the accepted survey responses. There were 19 respondents with unclear or missing responses.

Table 1

Online Survey — Type of Engagement With Hoon Driving Activity (Percentages) (n=599)

Organised events (*n*=352)	**%**
Driver only	13
Passenger/spectator only	61
Both driver and passenger/spectator	26
Spur-of-the-moment activities (*n*=552)	**%**
Driver only	38
Passenger only	29
Both driver and passenger/spectator	33

Focus Groups

Thirteen of the 18 focus group attendees presented as male.[11] Ten confirmed they were hoon drivers, nine of whom reported hoon driving within the preceding 12 months; two were hoon adjacent, as they knew people who engaged in hoon driving; and six were non-hoon drivers. The following pseudonyms are used alongside the illustrative quotations: FG1 – FG18, with modifiers to indicate whether participants were hoon drivers, hoon adjacent, or non-hoon drivers.

Soundbite Interviews

Of the 49 interviews, the majority of participants presented as male,[12] and were either attending alone or with peer groups (rather than family). However, no data were collected with respect to participant demographic attributes or self-reports of hoon driving. The following pseudonyms are used alongside the illustrative quotations: W location interviewees (SbW1–SbW10), S location interviewees (SbS1–SbS39).

It is acknowledged that the soundbite interviews were conducted at lawful driving events, and it is possible that participants had a vested interest in presenting a particular viewpoint (e.g., to support the event they had chosen to attend). However, responses were diverse and are reported on their merits.

Results

To inform consideration of hoon driving risks and harms, the results are presented in three sections: (1) Who are hoon drivers? (2) Where does hoon driving occur? (3) What are the risks and harms of hoon driving? The findings in relation to hoon driving locations are included to provide context for the specific risks and harms. The results draw primarily from the hoon driver responses to the online survey as this is the largest dataset. Soundbite interview and focus group findings supplement the survey results, where relevant.

Who are Hoon Drivers?

Demographics

Table 2 summarises gender and age information of the online survey respondents. There was a higher percentage of male respondents across all categories, with females comprising a larger proportion of the non-hoon drivers (29%) than any of the hoon driver cohorts. There was no significant difference in respondent age, but hoon drivers were older overall (Md = 39; IQR = 26–53 [aggregated for hoon drivers]).

The online survey included self-reported ethnicity/racial background, using questions adapted from Hopkins (2022). Of those who responded, 95% (*n*=1,067) self-identified as Caucasian. Given the nature of the sample, no further analysis was undertaken in relation to ethnic/racial background. No ethnicity data were collected from the focus groups or soundbite interviews.

Table 2

Online Survey — Respondent Gender and Age, by Hoon Category Type (n=1,190)

	Organised events only (n=50)		Spur of the moment only (n=256)		Both organised and spur of the moment (n=293)		Non-hoon (n=591)	
Gender (percentages)								
Male	89		89		94		70	
Female	2		10		3		29	
Other/self-definition	8		0		3		1	
Age (years)	**Md**	**IQR**	**Md**	**IQR**	**Md**	**IQR**	**Md**	**IQR**
	37	27–60	42	29–59	36	25–53	33	26–53

Note. Md = median, IQR = interquartile range (25th percentile, 75th percentile).

Across all hoon driver survey respondents, 29% had engaged in hoon driving during the preceding 12 months. This difference was associated with age: more recent hoon drivers were significantly younger (n=174; Md = 23; IQR=19–30) than those who had last engaged in hoon driving more than 12 months ago (n=425; Md = 48; IQR = 34–60; Mann-Whitney U z = 12.91, p<0.001).

Focus group and soundbite interview participants agreed that hoon driving is dominated by males. Some noted more varied gender participation, although there was no alignment between the presenting gender of participants and perceptions of hoon driver gender:

> I'd say almost a 100% male actually doing the hooning. I haven't actually seen a female participating or engaging in it ever. There's a lot of them who might be there to watch. (FG10 — hoon)

> Mainly blokes, definitely. It's most likely a testosterone thing. (SbS1)

> Male and female. I think they're both just as bad at the moment … . Used to be just the boys and the girls used to go and watch. Now I think the girls are just as bad. (SbS9)

Focus group and soundbite interview participants shared mixed perspectives about the age of hoon drivers, with no dominant age group noted:

> I would say it's a really broad church in that regard, like full licence, P plates,[13] older, younger, at least in my somewhat anecdotal sort of experience, but I've seen hundreds of people in this sort of space. (FG17 — hoon)

> It's right across the [age] spectrum as far as I'm concerned. (FG12 — hoon)

> It is lots of young guys or girls or even some people bring their kids and that sort of thing. (FG1 — hoon)

> I'm a bit older than probably some of the people here and I've got mates that are in their 50s, 60s who love to drop a skid or a burnout or whatever else. (FG1 — hoon)

> People in their 20s. It's like, yeah, just got a car. Let's just abuse it. Do whatever. (SbW10)

> So, I don't think it phases out with age, to be honest with you … I've got a 42-year-old uncle, and he still loves all this stuff. (SbS32)

Vehicles and Driving Experience

For the hoon driver survey respondents, the vehicle used at organised events and for spur-of-the-moment activities was most likely to be their own (66% and 70% respectively). Other reported owners included father, friends, grandparent, parents, or their employer.

Hoon driver survey respondents were more likely to have had their licence suspended/disqualified/cancelled (34%) compared with non-hoon driver respondents (9%). There was a significant association (chi-square(3)=27.69, p<0.001, Cramer's V=0.154) between hoon driver status and the number of weekly driving hours. Hoon driver respondents typically reported driving more than non-hoon drivers: 22% drove more than 15 hours per week, compared with 16% of non-hoon drivers; and 20% drove fewer than five hours per week, compared with 33% of non-hoon drivers.

Where Does Hoon Driving Occur?

Online survey respondents were asked about the most popular locations for both types of hoon driving activity. The findings for hoon driver respondents are noted within Table 3 to provide context for some of the harm-specific findings. Findings for non-hoon driver respondents are included for comparison.

Table 3

Online Survey — Hoon Driver Reported Locations for Organised Events (n=352) and Spur-of-the-Moment (SoM) Hoon Driving (n=552), and Perceptions of Common Locations From Non-Hoon Driver Respondents (n=591)

	Driver only		Passenger/spectator only		Both driver and passenger/spectator		Non-hoon drivers	
	Organised (%)	**SoM (%)**	**Organised (%)**	**SoM (%)**	**Organised (%)**	**SoM (%)**	**Organised (%)**	**SoM (%)**
Industrial/business	52	29	58	33	65	37	19	43
Rural	41	43	34	40	65	54	25	28
Off road (e.g., private land)	36	44	39	40	63	52	57	0
Car parks	18	12	31	16	36	22	16	26
Other	11	10	11	12	20	11	8	13
Residential	9	24	12	22	15	29	0	12
Highway/freeway	0	16	0	9	0	21	0	17

Note. Percentages add up to more than 100 as multiple responses were permitted.

There was limited discussion within the soundbite interviews relating to hoon driving locations. For the focus group participants, the most common responses were that hoon driving is likely to occur in industrial locations, residential areas, car parks, and rural areas. Three hoon driver participants spoke about deliberately choosing locations away from police:

> They occur in all sorts of places, back of industrial areas. (FG10 — hoon)

> Well-lit car parks with plenty of room. (FG1 — hoon)

> Remoteness is a priority, away from other road users and local residents is always best. Both from the likelihood of police presence perspective, and from a desire to not cause harm. (FG13 — hoon)

What are the Risks and Harms of Hoon Driving?

Physical Harms (Person, Vehicle, Property)

Table 4 summarises the number of hoon driving-related injuries (to self or others) and vehicle and property damage that hoon driver survey respondents had experienced or of which they were aware.

Table 4

Online Survey — Injuries, Vehicle and Property Damage Experienced by Hoon Drivers, Associated with Organised (Org) and Spur-of-the-Moment (SoM) Activities (Percentages) (n=599)

Injury or damage	Driver only (%)		Passenger/ spectator only (%)		Driver and passenger/ spectator (%)	
	Org	**SoM**	**Org**	**SoM**	**Org**	**SoM**
You or someone else injured (Organised *n*=342; Spur of the Moment *n*=499)						
Never	77	94	84	90	82	94
Once	11	3	9	7	11	4
2 or more times	11	4	7	2	7	3
One or more vehicles damaged (Organised *n*=336*; Spur of the Moment *n*=490)						
Never	52	79	51	77	37	68
Once	18	13	23	13	17	19
2 or more times	30	8	26	10	47*	14
Other property damaged (Organised *n*=328; Spur of the Moment *n*=487)						
Never	79	90	77	87	74	88
Once	7	7	11	6	10	8
2 or more times	14	3	12	7	16	5

Note. may not add up to 100% due to rounding; *chi-square test significant at $p<0.05$.

While the majority of survey respondents had not experienced or witnessed any injuries, approximately one in five of those who engaged in organised events reported having experienced at least one injury. Where injuries were reported, they were more commonly experienced during organised events, although injuries were not as prevalent as vehicle damage. Both property and vehicle damage were more commonly reported for organised events than spur-of-the-moment activities. Chi-square tests indicated only one significant difference between cohorts: those who engaged in hoon driving as both a driver and passenger/spectator at organised events were more likely to report damage to vehicles on two or more occasions (chi-square(4)=12.51, p=0.014, Cramer's V=0.136).

Physical injury was the most common type of harm discussed by the soundbite interview and focus group participants. However, this related primarily to consideration of hypothetical situations leading to the *potential risk* of physical harm:

> And who knows a bit of oil on that road will make that car skid and that's how people pass away. (SbW3)

> Well, as a spectator there's always a risk, for a burnout or donut type event … of getting hit by it with burning rubber or burning steel which comes out of the treads when they blow up. (FG10 — hoon)

> You can also end up killing someone. Doing it on the street and hit a pedestrian, they're dead. (FG5 — hoon)

Focus group participants also discussed general risk/s and vehicle damage. This was again framed in relation to perception and potential risk, and no specific examples of tangible harms were shared:

> People driving beyond their skill limit is a big one. … people are bad at measuring risk. (FG14 — hoon)

> Am I going to do damage to my vehicle or am I going to hit someone else or is there going to be some mechanical fault that causes me to lose control? (FG12 — hoon)

> If someone's doing stupid stuff in an area where people can come to risk, yeah, sure. But if that person's not causing excessive issues out the middle of nowhere, I'm not sure I care, if I'm being truthful. (FG14 — hoon)

Community/Environmental Harms

As the project originally focused on physical harms (i.e., crashes and injuries), the online survey did not directly examine community or environmental consequences associated with hoon driving, and no such issues were raised within the open text responses. The soundbite interviews and focus groups were able to capture harms more broadly. While participants devoted more time to the discussion of the potential for physical harm/s, they were more likely to recognise the actual occurrence of specific community harms, including marks on the road, debris, and damage to property:

> You will see a lot of black marks on the road around this town. (SbS20)

> They're leaving damage, just shredded rubber and churned up grass or whatever it might be. (SbW6)

Non-hoon driver participants expressed particular concern about noise and community disruption, with these issues receiving little attention from the hoon driver participants:

> But at nighttime would often hear the racing screeching tyres and obviously see evidence of that on the roads in the morning with bits of tyre everywhere and black marks and so that's probably I guess the most exposure I would have to it. (FG15 — non-hoon)

Community harms were also discussed in relation to environmental effects associated with fuel consumption and pollution. One hoon driver minimised these harms by comparing them with other causes of pollution:

> My attitude has always been that my fuel use is far less than some of the vehicles that are allowed on our roads … . I know that even with my behaviour, I'm still burning less fuel than some very sedate daily drivers that are on the road. (FG17 — hoon)

Legal Risks and Harms

The hoon driver survey respondents were asked about legal risks and consequences related to their own hoon driving activities, with a focus on law enforcement engagement and criminal legal responses and outcomes.

When examining hoon drivers only, Table 5 summarises the number of times these respondents reported being stopped by police in relation to their hoon driving. The figures show the percentage of relevant category totals. The majority reported that they had never been stopped by police, but those aged under 40 were more likely to have been stopped, as were respondents who had engaged in hoon driving more recently.

Table 5

Online Survey — Percentage of Hoon Drivers who Had Been Stopped by Police: All Hoon Driver Respondents, By Age, and Most Recent Hoon Driving Experience (n=588)

	All hoon drivers	**By age category (years of age)**			**Most recent hoon driving**	
	%	**18–25**	**26–40**	**>40**	**<12m ago**	**>12m ago**
Never	85	74	74	95	73	88
Once	8	15	11	2	13	6
2 or 3 times	5	5	9	2	8	4
> 3 times	3	6	7	1	6	3

The online survey included the Attitudes Towards Police Legitimacy Scale Short Form (APLS-SF; Reynolds, 2023) to measure respondent attitudes towards interactions with police. Respondents rated their agreement with a range of statements, such as *The presence of police makes me feel safe*, and *People should trust the police to help*. Higher scores on the scale represent more positive attitudes towards police (scores can range from 11–55).

Respondents who participated in any type of hoon driving (n=499; M=36.04; SD=10.31) rated significantly lower on the APLS-SF compared with those who self-identified as non-hoon drivers (n=555; M=42.92; SD=5.98; t(1052)=13.40, p<0.001). And respondents who had engaged in any type of hoon driving within the preceding 12 months (n=147; M=33.78; SD=10.75) scored significantly lower than those who had not participated recently (n=352; M=36.99; SD=9.98; t(497)=3.20, p=0.001).

Table 6 summarises the criminal legal consequences reported by online survey respondents, aggregated for all hoon drivers, and reported by age category and by most recent hoon driving experience. Figures represent the percentage of relevant totals. Drivers aged 26–40 years and those who had engaged in hoon driving more recently reported a higher percentage of specific and more serious legal consequences, such as being charged with an offence, licence suspension/cancellation, or imprisonment.

Table 6

Online Survey — Percentage of Negative Consequences of Hoon Driving Reported by Hoon Driver Respondents (Multiple Responses Permitted) (n=599)

	All hoon drivers	By age category (years of age)			Most recent hoon driving	
	%	18–25	26–40	>40	<12m ago	>12m ago
None of the listed consequences	62	64	49	69	56	62
Fined	14	12	22	11	18	13
Loss of demerit points	13	8	23	9	18	11
Chased by police	11	6	15	10	11	10
Charged with an offence	9	7	13	9	11	9
Licence suspension or cancellation	9	7	14	6	10	8
Disqualification from driving	4	3	7	3	4	4
Found/plead guilty	4	3	8	3	5	4
Impounded vehicle	3	5	7	0	8	1
Arrested	3	2	5	2	4	2
Enrolled in a safe driving program	3	3	6	1	5	2
Other	3	2	2	3	2	3
Charge withdrawn	2	5	3	1	5	1
Immobilised vehicle	2	2	4	1	3	2
Vehicle forfeited/sold/destroyed	2	2	4	0	2	2
Acquitted following a trial	2	2	1	2	3	1
Imprisonment	1	1	3	0	3	0
Compensation order	1	1	2	0	2	0

Discussion

This article examines perceived and self-reported risks and harms associated with hoon driving. It draws from a study, initiated by Victoria's Department of Justice and Community Safety, which addressed seven core questions regarding hoon driving behaviours. The study engaged directly with people who participated in two key categories of hoon driving — unlawful organised gatherings and spur of the moment activities — as well as the wider community of non-hoon drivers. The results indicate that most hoon drivers are male[14] and aged under 40, although there was acknowledgement of a broader age range. Female driver participation was reported to be more limited, with females more likely to attend events as spectators and/or to participate as passengers. The findings are broadly consistent with other research highlighting the predominance of younger male participants, and some evidence of engagement in specific activities by women and older men (e.g., Amit et al., 2016;

Begg & Langley, 2001; Daigle et al., 2014; DTP, 2023b, 2023c; Folkman, 2005; Leal et al., 2007; Voogt et al., 2014; Watson-Brown et al., 2022).

There is limited evidence of an association between hoon driving and tangible physical harms (i.e., crashes causing injury) for the sample as a whole. However, approximately one in five of the survey respondents who engaged in organised events reported at least one injury associated with such events. The perceived risk/s and potential for physical harm were also emphasised repeatedly, particularly by non-hoon driver respondents. In a context where perceived risks are routinely used to frame and justify key responses to hoon driving, it is notable that these perceptions were largely not borne out by the self-reported experiences of hoon drivers. It is possible that hoon driver respondents chose not to be transparent about specific harms, but these findings are consistent with other research. The hoon driving behaviours examined in this study have been attributed to only a small number of road crashes and associated injuries, and there is limited objective evidence of specific road safety risks (Clark et al., 2011; Folkman, 2005; Leal, 2010; Leal & Watson, 2011; Watson-Brown et al., 2022). Any elevated risk may be associated with the hoon driver themselves, and be present in any driving context, rather than related to these specific hoon driving activities (Leal, 2010). Hoon driver survey respondents in the current study were more likely to report having had their licence suspended/disqualified/cancelled and typically spent more time driving each week, when compared with non-hoon driver respondents. These findings intersect with broader understandings that driving-related harms are more likely to be associated with other potentially problematic driving behaviours, such as general speeding, inattention, or inexperience, along with external factors (road conditions, weather, etc.) (Rolison, 2020). Following their study in South Australia, Wundersitz and Raftery (2025) concluded that fatal and injury-related road crashes were more likely to be attributable to issues other than illegal driver behaviours. They noted that key risks could potentially be addressed through refinements within road transport systems, such as infrastructure management, travel speeds, and vehicle design.

This study found some evidence that vehicle and property damage can occur when drivers engage in specific hoon driving behaviours. It is acknowledged that hoon drivers may be less likely to report more minor incidents and, if the hoon driving activity took place in a remote or less public location, issues related to vehicle or property damage may be less evident and/or not reported by others. Hoon drivers reported that organised hoon driving events most commonly occur at industrial locations and along rural roads, with some use of private land, with these locations affording essential space and meeting point requirements. Spur-of-the-moment hoon driving takes place on residential roads, private land, and rural roads, with some use of industrial locations. The popularity of these locations may align with the opportunistic nature of spur-of-the-moment behaviours, and may also reflect a conscious desire to avoid detection and/or to reduce the risk of harm/s. Previous research has noted a similar variety of hoon driving locations (Clark et al., 2011; DTP, 2023b, 2023c; Watson-Brown et al., 2022). In their study of 'boy racers' in New Zealand, Falconer and Kingham (2007, p. 188) acknowledged that locational decisions reflected a need to shield hoon driving from "suspicious eyes", suggesting an awareness of the illegality and, perhaps, the nuisance of such behaviours. If the locations favoured by hoon drivers are likely to be more isolated or secluded, this may obscure these driving behaviours and reduce the risk of contact with other vehicles and/or property. It may also reduce the likelihood that any incidents will be reported, by hoon drivers themselves or by other people. In their study of young drivers in Queensland and Victoria, Bates and Anderson (2021) identified active avoidance, via methods including locational decisions, as a key enabler of hoon driving activity.

In a context where hoon drivers may be seeking out more remote and less busy locations, the result may amplify underlying, if unsubstantiated, perceptions of risk and presumptions of dangerousness on the part of the wider community. This can be exacerbated by media coverage of high-profile incidents, which may embed feelings of despair and expectations of risk, regardless of the actual prevalence, location, and reported risk. The lack of direct visibility of specific hoon driving activities, and a dominant discourse that problematises certain cohorts, could also increase the conflation (within community, police, and political perspectives) with other types of risky driving, such as tailgating and speeding, which may be more visible and more readily experienced. This speaks to the potential effects of concept creep (Haslam et al., 2020) in the language of hoon driving, who engages in it, and associated assumptions about what it entails. This study did not explore specific intersections with other forms of risky driving, or other anti-social or problematic behaviours and associated harms. However, where perceptions do relate hoon driving behaviours to generally anti-social populations, this may further embed the belief that hoon driving (and those who engage in it) are more problematic and inherently riskier than the evidence necessarily suggests. While unsubstantiated, this perceived link may then feed community perceptions of specific risks associated with hoon driving itself, and expectations of lawlessness associated with those who engage in hoon driving.

The focus groups and soundbite interviews enabled a deeper examination of specific risks and harms.[15] From the perspective of non-hoon driver participants, environmental harms were identified as particularly significant and enduring consequences of hoon driving, with attention drawn to noise, road damage, and general detritus. Issues related to fuel consumption and pollution were noted, but largely minimised. This is an aspect of hoon driving, and of driving more broadly, that merits more careful

analysis particularly given global concerns associated with climate change (Stevenson et al., 2025). The findings related to environmental harms align with the wilful and unconscious damage to public spaces that was associated with the 'boy racer' subculture in New Zealand (Falconer & Kingham, 2007). Across Victoria, hoon driving has been identified as an amenity issue, with council concerns regarding excessive noise, damage to roads and public spaces, waste/rubbish left after group events, debris and rubber left on the roads, and road infrastructure costs (e.g., road surfaces, speed humps) (Bass Coast Council, n.d.; East Gippsland Shire Council, 2023; Farmer et al. 2025a; Latrobe City Council, n.d.). However, limited research has specifically explored the environmental consequences of hoon driving or how these effects could be mitigated or minimised.[16] Importantly, opposition to hoon driving at community and policy levels continues to be framed around presumptions of safety and risk, rather than more demonstrable effects, such as environmental harms.

Notwithstanding the likely effects of remote locations and the potential under-reporting of specific incidents, the physical harms associated with hoon driving should be relatively straightforward to discern and quantify (e.g., road crashes, injuries, property damage). By contrast, amenity-focused harms[17] — those that impact the quality of life within the communities in which hoon driving takes place — can be more ambiguous and subjective. People may be affected by hoon driving-related noise, smells, potential fear, etc. in different ways and to different degrees. Consideration of the principle of accumulative harm (von Hirsch, 1996) may also be relevant, potentially mediated by individual and acculturated responses to sensory stimuli, and cumulative tolerance (Duff & Marshall, 2006). In the context of hoon driving, one person doing a burnout may not be inherently problematic or sufficiently harmful to register or warrant a response. However, the noise and disruption associated with repeated burnouts in the same locations may create and sustain more tangible community harms — individually and/or collectively. Such harms may then serve to inform the generally negative community perceptions of those who engage in hoon driving (Farmer et al., 2025b), fed by a belief that hoon drivers embody an intentional disregard of the rights of others to enjoy the peaceful amenity of their neighbourhood. Further examination of these effects sits outside the scope of this article, but the specific consequences of repeated and ongoing exposure to the noise and localised disruption associated with hoon driving is an aspect that merits much closer attention.

Hoon driving enforcement provisions typically rely on the fear and expectation of being caught (Bates & Anderson, 2021; Davey & Freeman, 2011; Truelove et al., 2021). Hoon driver participants in this study perceived and experienced this risk to be low, and there were limited specific legal consequences reported. It is not clear if the hoon drivers felt that they could outsmart police via active avoidance methods (Watson-Brown et al., 2022) or if they believed that the risk related simply to luck, i.e., "wrong place, wrong time" (Clark et al., 2011, p. 7). Extrapolating from the findings reported by Truelove et al. (2021) in relation to drivers who engage in excess speed, it is reasonable to suggest that a lack of fear of legal consequences may make hoon driving behaviours more likely. The online survey confirmed significantly lower levels of perceived police legitimacy within the hoon driver cohort. Given the low reported likelihood of being stopped by police for their driving-related actions, these hoon driver views may reflect a sense of othering, more general perceptions of over-policing, or of disproportionate responses across a range of situations, rather than specific hoon driving-related interactions with law enforcement. There is a risk, albeit unquantified, that a lack of perceived police legitimacy could act as a motivator for some hoon drivers — to take risks, to test themselves, and to see if they will get caught.

Two thirds of hoon drivers in the current study reported using their own vehicle for hoon driving activities. Those who use a vehicle belonging or registered to someone else may not be deterred by impound laws, and they may be cognisant of appeal provisions in relation to a vehicle impoundment (e.g., *Vehicle Impoundment and Other Amendments Act* 2005 (Vic), s. 84O; *Road Safety Amendment (Hoon Driving) Act* 2010 (Vic), s. 13). Collectively, this may limit specific concerns about vehicle-focused consequences of hoon driving. In a study by Leal et al. (2009), participants reported their intent to continue to engage in hoon driving behaviour despite regarding vehicle impound laws as severe, with some actively utilising policy workarounds.

Conclusion

This article examines key risks and harms associated with hoon driving, as perceived and reported by the notable body of hoon drivers who engaged with the study, and by non-hoon driver participants. While this article has not evaluated specific hoon driving policy responses, deterrents, or enforcement provisions, the findings reinforce the need to exercise caution when developing policy, particularly in response to perceptions of risk and harm. They also highlight the need for flexibility with respect to conceptions and definitions of the harms that can be associated with hoon driving. Predominantly young men engaging in activities that many community members perceive to be, at best, inherently anti-social and, at worst, high risk and dangerous, hoon drivers are an easy target to be problematised. As this article confirms, specific risk factors are highly nuanced. Where physical risks are more evident, this appears to relate more to the drivers themselves than to the hoon driving activities. The hoon driving cohort tend to be younger, to drive more, and to have less respect for law enforcement. Despite the lack of tangible evidence, negative community perceptions persist, and hoon driving continues to be associated with more general

lawlessness and disorder. What is evident, from this and other studies, is that the hoon driving cohort appear more likely to take risks in other driving contexts, and it is this that may be associated with any heightened risk of harm. By engaging directly with hoon drivers, this article provides an important contribution to the body of research examining nuisance driving and enhances understanding of hoon driver perceptions, perspectives, and experiences. It highlights, in particular, the importance of bringing into the conversation those who undertake behaviours that are regarded as a problem, in order to inform community, law enforcement, and wider policy responses.

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[1] The term joyrider/riding is also used in the UK, but typically in relation to nuisance driving in a stolen vehicle.
[2] See Victorian Government (2024) for the current version of this strategy.
[3] There is some overlap between the three articles, with respect to research context, but each article draws from specific data sources and addresses different aspects of the study.
[4] While this article does not include a detailed analysis of deterrence, an overview of literature addressing perceptual deterrence, compliance, and legitimacy is included within Farmer (2022) and Curtis et al. (2022).
[5] As set out in the Introduction to this article, the overall study addressed seven research questions: (1) Who are hoon drivers? (2) Why do hoon drivers participate in this activity? (3) Where and when does hoon driving occur, and why are these locations chosen? (4) What crashes and injuries have hoon drivers witnessed, been involved in? (5) What fines, charges, impounds have they experienced and what were the impacts of these? (6) What are the attitudes of those who hoon toward police/legitimacy/procedural fairness? (7) What would deter people from hooning?
[6] Across this article, unless otherwise specified, 'organised events' refers to non-lawful gatherings in accordance with this scoping requirement.
[7] The ethics approval for this project specifically permitted the inclusion of participants who were aged 16 and 17 years. This was in recognition that, in Victoria, young people are able to start driving, with supervision, from the age of 16.
[8] The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) scale ranges from 143, at the lower end of disadvantage, up to 1207 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).
[9] For example, attendees could be drawn from/reside within a range of locations, but this was not addressed within the soundbite interviews.
[10] Not all respondents answered every question.
[11] The gender of focus group and soundbite interview participants was determined subjectively by the facilitator/s and interviewer/s — participants were not asked to share their gender or age. As a result, while participant gender is occasionally referenced within the results to contextualise specific findings, gender-related analyses were not a primary focus of the study.
[12] See endnote 18.
[13] In Victoria, new drivers aged under 21 are subject to a two-stage four-year probationary (P) licence system. Drivers have a P1 red P-plate licence for the first year, and a P2 green P-plate licence for the next three years.
[14] The gender binary presented within the analysis reflected the data that were collected.
[15] As the underpinning research questions focused on personal risks and harms, the online survey did not specifically address environmental consequences.
[16] In September 2025, Professor Ian Loader commenced a three-year project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, titled: Car harms: automobility and the object of criminology (University of Oxford Faculty of Law, 2025).
[17] This article does not have space to offer a deeper theoretical exploration of the concept and/or principle of harm, as set out, for example, by Mill (1859), Feinberg (1987), and others.

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