

Anxiety is a killer distraction on our roads

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Driving while stressed can be as distracting and dangerous as talking on your mobile phone, according to a study by Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

Idees Wong, from QUT's Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland (CARRS-Q), studied 75 [drivers](#) aged 17 to 47 to investigate the negative impact anxiety had on driver performance.

"Being anxious makes drivers unable to fully focus their attention on the road, particularly in urban areas, where there are plenty of distractions and when time pressured," said Ms Wong, whose research was awarded the top RACQ Road Safety Prize.

She said urban environments also posed an increased threat because there were significantly more distractions, such as billboards and increased traffic levels, for drivers to deal with.

"This study found that highly anxious drivers had significantly longer response times as tasks increased in difficulty," she said.

"This indicates that high-anxious drivers maintain accuracy at the expense of response time."

Ms Wong said what was of most concern about this was that drivers with slower response times were at greater risk of being involved in an accident.

"Attention lapses have been shown to be a leading cause of traffic crashes," she said.

"For example, crash statistics from South Australia revealed inattention was believed to be a major contributing factor in as many as 60 per cent of fatal crashes in 2008."

She said this study highlighted that [anxiety](#) had a significant negative impact on a driver's concentration resulting in longer reaction time.

"What this study aims to do is help drivers recognise the importance of avoiding driving while under stress," Ms Wong said.

"Motorists commonly put themselves under unnecessary pressure to arrive quickly at their destination, so simple things like pre-planning your trip or allowing more time to travel can greatly reduce [stress](#) levels and help ensure drivers arrive safely.

"It is important to recognise that being anxious can affect driving ability in the same way as taking your eyes off the road or talking on a mobile phone."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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