

Research letter

Deaths and injuries from road rage: cases in Canadian newspapers

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In the past few years “road rage” has appeared as a new problem for Canadians, at least in the popular media. Reports on road rage have recently come from Canada,¹ as well as the United States²⁻⁴ and Europe.^{5,6} The term road rage has no clear definition but is used when a driver or passenger attempts to kill, injure or intimidate a pedestrian or another driver or passenger or to damage their vehicle in a traffic incident. There is surprisingly little reliable information or scientific research on road rage in Canada and elsewhere.⁷

Newspaper reports represent one of the few sources of information about road rage, because neither health care facilities nor the police routinely collect information about this problem. The purpose of this article is to examine reports of road rage incidents in Canadian newspapers.

We examined reports for 1998–2000 from the archives of the Canadian Press, a wire service that gathers news from 99 newspapers in all areas in Canada and has its own reporters in most major Canadian cities. We obtained all reports in the study period in which road rage was mentioned in the title or text. In 96 articles, 59 separate cases of road rage were reported; the major features of the cases are summarized in Table 1.

Most reported road rage cases occurred because of cutting in and out, lane changes, disputes over parking spots or rude gestures. Young people and men were most frequently involved in road rage cases. There were male perpetrators in 57 cases (96.6%) and female perpetrators in only 5 (8.5%). Men were victims of road rage in 57 cases (96.6%), as were women in 13 cases (22%). The average age was 33.0 years for perpetrators and 34.3 years for victims.

Among the cases reported, 72.9% involved nonfatal injuries to 59 individuals (43 cases) and 6.8% involved deaths (4 cases). All of the reported injuries were serious and required medical attention. In all but 2 cases that involved injury to pedestrians, all of those injured were drivers or passengers. The most common injuries occurred as a result of beatings with fists, bats or clubs. Three deaths involved shootings and one, a heart attack.

In 43 cases (72.9%), criminal charges were laid, usually

Table 1: Characteristics of road rage cases (n = 59) in the Canadian Press archives for 1998–2000

| Characteristic | No. (and %) of cases |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Nonfatal injury* | 43 (72.9) |
| Death | 4 (6.8) |
| Male victim(s) | 57 (96.6) |
| Female victim(s) | 13 (22.0) |
| Male perpetrator(s) | 57 (96.6) |
| Female perpetrator(s) | 5 (8.5) |
| Criminal charges laid | 43 (72.9) |

*Total no. of individuals with nonfatal injuries reported = 59.

assault, manslaughter or dangerous driving, because there is no charge specifically for “road rage.” In no cases were charges for alcohol or drugs offences laid, nor is alcohol or drug consumption mentioned in any of the cases in which police investigations were reported.

Newspaper reports cannot be used to estimate the total number of cases but can give us a first, cursory look at road rage, and it appears that road rage does result in deaths and serious injuries in Canada. These reports could represent the “tip of the iceberg,” with many or most cases going unreported. Survey research on the experience of road rage is necessary. In addition, information about road rage may be concealed in official reports of driver actions as causes of collisions. For example, in Ontario in 1998, 57.8% of fatal collisions involved unknown driver actions or actions not considered proper driving, including following too close, failure to yield right of way, careless driving and dangerous driving.⁸ It is possible that, on closer inspection, collision statistics could reveal a significant role for road rage as a cause of death and injury on Canadian roads.

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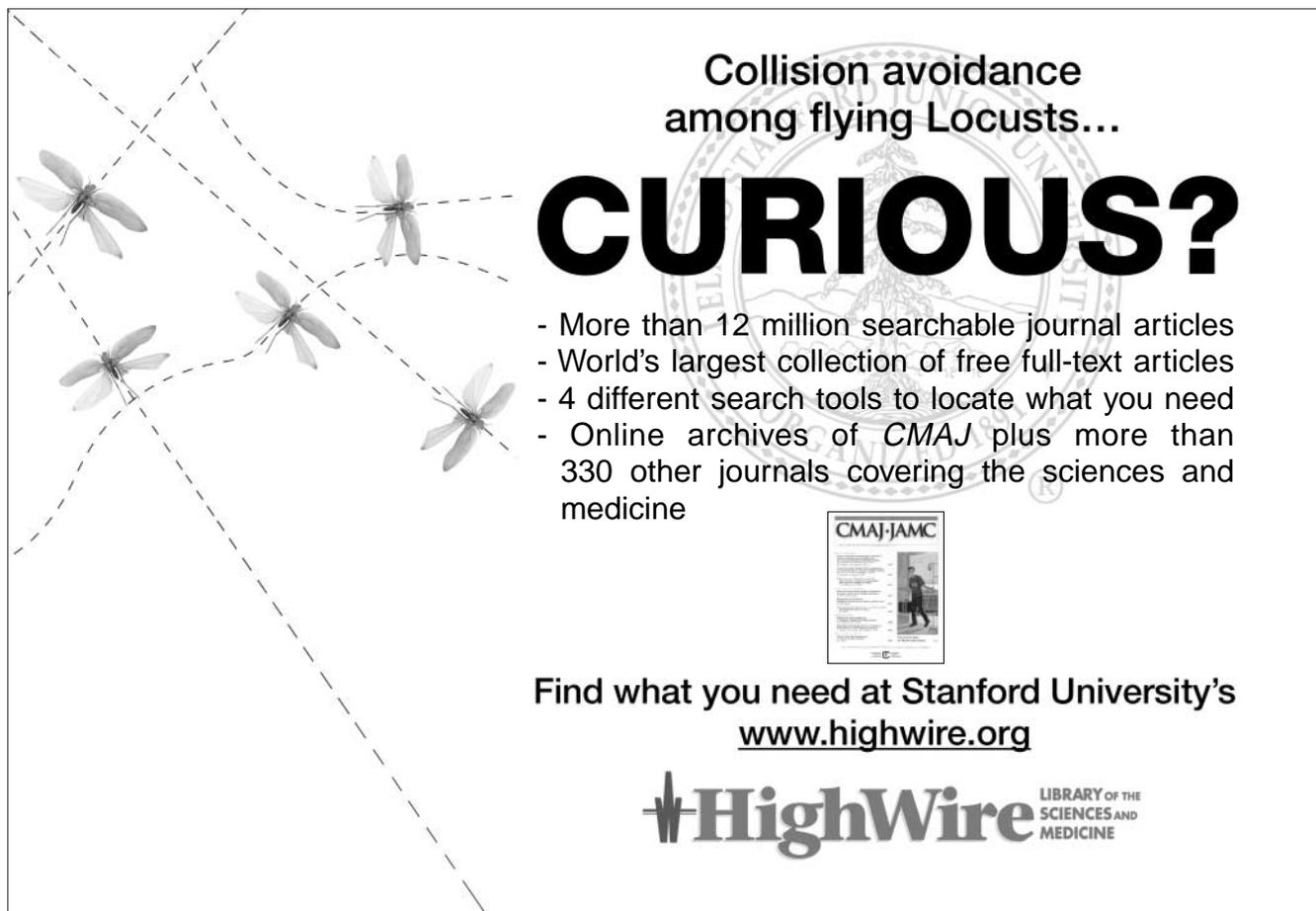
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