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ROAD ACCIDENTS IN FINLAND

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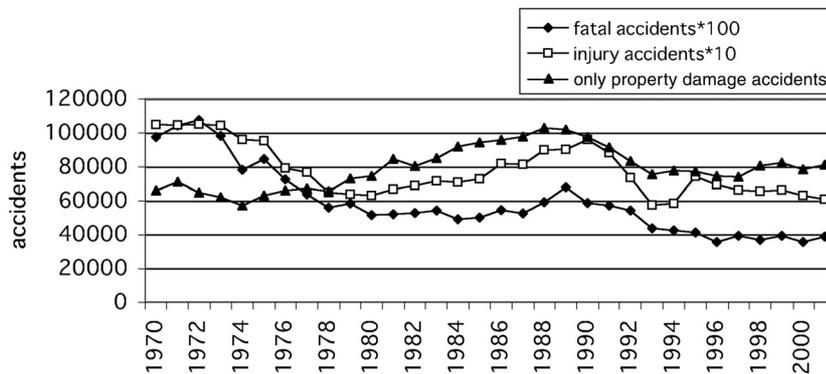
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1. INTRODUCTION

The number of fatal road traffic accidents in Finland reached its peak at the beginning of the 1970's (1,100 accidents), after which it has decreased in a fluctuating way. If we consider the whole time period from 1970 to 2001, we see that the number of minor, property damage only accidents has increased by about 30%, whereas the number of injury accidents has decreased by about 40% and the number of fatal accidents by about 60% (Figure 1). In relative terms, the safety increase has been greatest among vulnerable road users, especially among pedestrians. Consequently, there has been a relative increase in the proportion of fatalities among car drivers and passengers, exceeding 60% of all road traffic fatalities in 2001 (Figure 2).

The oil crisis at the beginning of the 1970's is certainly one of the reasons for this safety increase, as people cut down on driving. However, many preventive measures were introduced during this decade, e.g. speed limits on all roads (1974), compulsory use of seat belts in the front seat of passenger cars (1975), and mandatory use of winter tyres during the winter months (1978). The effect of these measures is evident in the decrease in fatal accidents and serious injury accidents.

Despite these measures, however, the decrease came to a halt at the beginning of the 1980's, and the increase in the number of accidents that followed continued until 1989. The increase was irregular: the number of fatal accidents reached a new peak in 1989 (677 accidents), the number of injury accidents in 1990 (9,600 accidents), and



(Note: The number of fatal accidents was multiplied by 100 and number of injury accidents multiplied by 10)²

Fig. 1 Accident trends in Finland 1970-2001

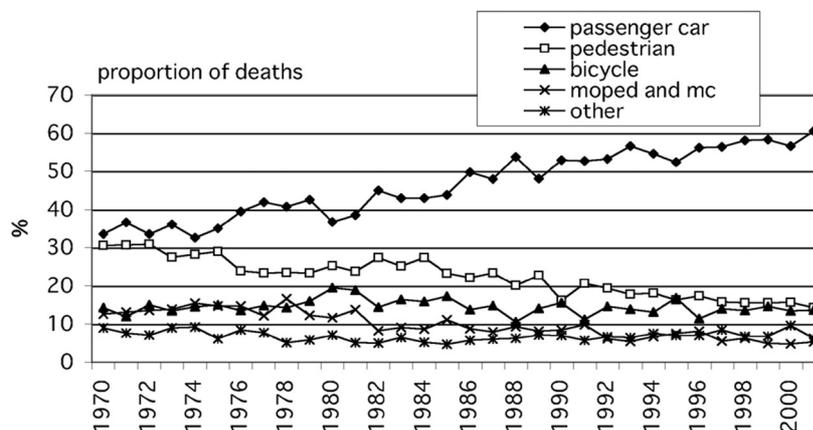


Fig. 2 Killed in road traffic accidents by road user group²

the number of property only accidents in 1988 (almost 100,000 accidents). A decade of accelerating economic growth ended in a bank crisis in 1990, causing a decline in road traffic exposure from 1990 to 1994. However, road traffic began to increase in 1995 again and has grown ever since¹.

2. SAFETY MEASURES AND ACCIDENT TRENDS IN THE 1990'S

The safety of young drivers was in the spotlight during the 1990's. Driver training was completely renewed in 1990. The renewal brought new contents into the curriculum, e.g. night driving exercises, exercises in driving in slippery conditions, new textbooks, and gradually also new teaching methods and a revised driver exami-

nation. A system with driving ban for repeat offences was introduced in 1996, being stricter than before with novice drivers in that the driving licence gets suspended if the driver commits two offences in the course of one year, or three offences in the course of two years.

A close look at fatal accident statistics of drivers in different age groups reveals that the major accident reduction evolved among the youngest drivers (Figure 3). These drivers are at the same time also novice drivers, the accident risk of whom is generally speaking high. The total number of novice drivers' accidents per novice licence holders during the first four years of independent driving has decreased since 1990. The trend is similar for fatal accidents, injury accidents as well as property damage only accidents (Figures 4–6). Today, a novice driver in Finland reaches the safety level of the general driver

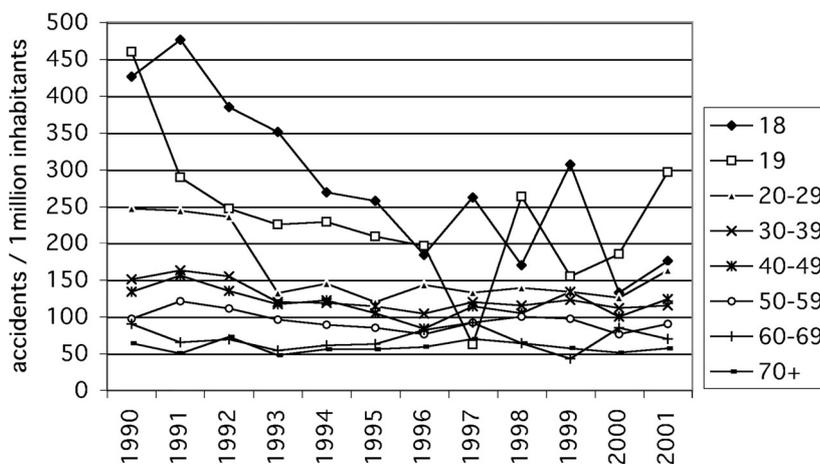


Fig. 3 Risk of fatal accident as a car driver in different age groups³

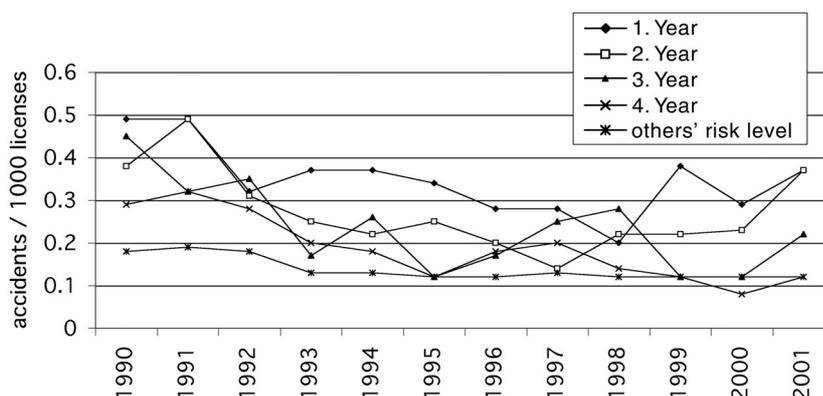


Fig. 4 Novice driver's risk of fatal accident and other drivers' risk level⁴

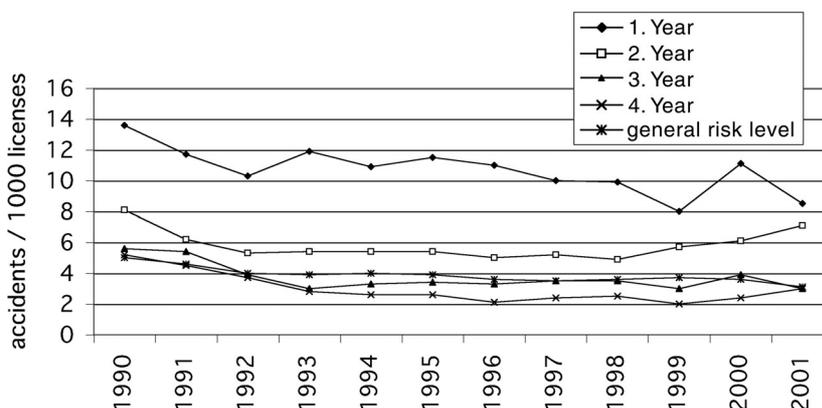


Fig. 5 Novice driver's risk of injury accident and risk level of all drivers⁵

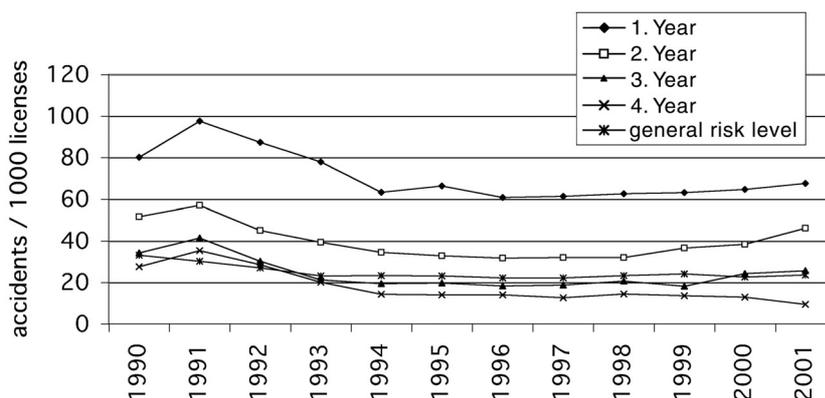


Fig. 6 Novice driver's risk of property damage accident and risk level of all drivers⁶

population already after three to four years of independent driving. There are however, despite the recent positive traffic safety development, signs showing that more effective safety measures are still needed in order to promote traffic safety in general and the safety of novice drivers in particular.

REFERENCES

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6. Insurance companies' data on property damage motor vehicle accidents (VALT, 2002) and registry of driving licences (Vehicle Administration, 2002)