# Knowledge and practices regarding cell phone use while driving — perspective from Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan

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Madam, there are no studies on cell phone use while driving in Pakistan. In 2008, the mobile phone penetration rate was 57% in the country.[1] Cell phone use, whether hands-free or handheld, impairs driving performance.[2,3]

Table: Demographic characteristics of respondents and their responses to questions on cell phone use while driving.

| **Used cell phone for making/receiving a call or SMS while driving in the 30 days** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Yes (N = 195)** | | **No (N =117)** | | **P-value**** |
| | **Male (N=122)** | **Female (N=73)** | **Male (N=58)** | **Female (N=59)** | |
| **Mean Age (Years)** | 22.7±2.6 | 22.5±2.4 | 23.1±2.4 | 21.4±1.8 | |
| **Education** | | | | | |
| 10 Years | 16 (13.1%) | 5 (6.8%) | 2 (3.5%) | 0 (%) | |
| 12 Years | 18 (14.7%) | 8 (11%) | 4 (6.9%) | 4 (6.8%) | |
| 14 Years | 80 (65.6%) | 42 (57.5%) | 46 (79.3%) | 43 (72.9%) | |
| Above 14 | 8 (6.6%) | 18 (24.7%) | 6 (10.3%) | 12 (20.3%) | |
| **Is it safe to make/receive calls while driving during daytime?** | | | | | <0.0001* |
| Yes | 34 (27.9%) | 26 (35.6%) | 7 (12.1%) | 8 (13.6%) | |
| No | 88 (72.1%) | 47 (64.4%) | 51 (87.9%) | 51 (86.4%) | |
| **Is it safe to make/receive calls while driving during evening/nighttime?** | | | | | 0.001* |
| Yes | 35 (28.7%) | 19 (26%) | 8 (13.8%) | 6 (10.2%) | |
| No | 87 (71.3%) | 54 (74%) | 50 (86.2%) | 53 (89.8%) | |
| **Is it safer to make/receive calls while driving when there is less traffic/rush on the road, but not during the rush/busy traffic?** | | | | | 0.226 |
| Yes | 72(59%) | 45 (61.6%) | 29 (50%) | 33 (55.9%) | |
| No | 50 (41%) | 28 (38.4%) | 29 (50%) | 26 (44.1%) | |
| **Is it safer to make/receive calls through a hands-free cell phone but not while using a hand-held phone while driving?** | | | | | 0.003* |
| Yes | 78 (63.9%) | 55 (75.3%) | 26 (44.8%) | 34 (57.6%) | |
| No | 44 (36.1%) | 18 (24.7%) | 32 (55.2%) | 25 (42.4%) | |
| **Is it safer to make/receive calls of short duration but not a long duration while driving?** | | | | | 0.135 |
| Yes | 70 (57.4%) | 42 (57.5%) | 22 (37.9%) | 35 (59.3%) | |
| No | 52 (42.6%) | 31 (42.5%) | 36 (62.1%) | 24 (40.7%) | |
| **Is it safer to make/receive calls while driving alone but not when children are also present in the car?** | | | | | 0.006* |
| Yes | 43 (35.2%) | 22 (30.1%) | 9 (15.5%) | 13 (22%) | |
| No | 79 (64.8%) | 51 (69.9%) | 49 (84.5%) | 46 (78%) | |
| **Is it safer to make/receive social calls but not work related calls, while driving?** | | | | | 0.006* |
| Yes | 42 (34.4%) | 23 (31.5%) | 14 (24.1%) | 8 (13.6%) | |
| No | 80 (65.6%) | 50 (68.5%) | 44(75.9%) | 51 (86.4%) | |
| **Is it safe to listen to iPod plugged into ears or other MP3 players while driving?** | | | | | <0.0001* |
| Yes | 71 (58.2%) | 40 (54.8%) | 15 (25.9%) | 15 (25.4%) | |
| No | 51 (41.8%) | 33 (45.2%) | 43 (74.1%) | 44 (74.6%) | |
| **Were you involved in a roadside traffic accident in the past one year?** | | | | | 0.001* |
| Yes | 62 (50.8%) | 20 (27.4%) | 20 (34.5%) | 7 (11.9%) | |
| No | 60 (49.2%) | 53 (72.6%) | 38 (65.5%) | 52 (88.1%) | |

* Statistical significance defined by two-sided P-value of <0.05.

** Chi-Square tests were applied to determine the statistical significance of associations between having used cell phones/sms in the past 30 days while driving a car or not, and various questions asked.

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Using cell phone while driving increases the probability of roadside accidents as much as four times, with resultant injuries and even death.[4,5] This study was conducted in

Islamabad and Rawalpindi to study the knowledge and practices regarding cell phone use while driving among non-commercial drivers.

A cross-sectional survey with convenience sampling was conducted among 20-29-year-old men and women in Islamabad and Rawalpindi at various universities and shopping malls from January-April 2011. The objective was to study their knowledge, and practices pertaining to cell phone use while driving. An interviewer-administered, pre-tested, structured questionnaire with close-ended questions was used for this purpose. Individuals who owned a personal cell phone and drove a car at least once a week were interviewed by two trained graduate students, after obtaining verbal consent and ensuring confidentiality. Results were analysed using the Stata data analysis and statistical software; chi-square test was applied to assess the relationships between various binary variables on knowledge, attitudes, and cell phone use while driving in the past 30 days.

Cumulatively, 312 individuals were interviewed, of whom 180 (57.7%) were male and 132 (42.3%) were female respondents. Table provides the frequency and statistical significance of opinions/practices on cell phone use. 195 (62.5%) respondents had used a cell phone in the past 30 days while driving, despite 135 (69.2%) and 141 (72.3%) of them knowing that it is unsafe to do so during the daytime or night-time, respectively. Those who had used cell phone in the past 30 days compared to ones who did not were more likely to reply affirmatively to the use of cell phone with children present in the car, an iPod/MP3 player plugged in their ears, or restricting the use to social calls only. 109 (34.9%) respondents were involved in the roadside traffic accidents in the past one year, with those who had used cell phone in the past 30 days while driving being more likely to be involved in a statistically significant manner.

This study underscores the need for undertaking nationally representative epidemiologic studies to better understand use of cell phone and its correlates while driving, so as to empirically determine the need for planning effective and targeted health education programs for improving road safety in Pakistan.

## References

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