

Aggressive Driving and Road Rage: is it worth your life?

By Mukela Mangolwa

Aggressive driving has been a problem on our roads for a while, and it seems to only be getting worse. Incidents of screaming, rude gestures, and sometimes even violence are reported frequently on our roadways to the point where it has earned its own name: road rage. This is more pronounced in incidences involving Public Service Vehicle (PSVs) drivers or more specifically mini bus driver as they are commonly known in Zambia. The RTSA Call Centre is mostly flooded reports of complaints relating to one or the other.

As road users it is important that we understand what causes road rage, whether we are prone to it, and how we can help to keep our roads safe by not giving in to road rage.

The term Road Rage is defined as when a driver "commits moving traffic offenses so as to endanger other persons or property; an assault with a motor vehicle or other dangerous weapon by the operator or passenger of one motor vehicle on the operator or passengers of another motor vehicle".

It is also important to understand that there is a clear distinction between road rage and aggressive driving, where the former is a criminal charge and the latter a traffic offense. This definition places the blame on the driver.

In as much as mini bus drivers can be identified as the leading perpetrators of this vice ordinary motorists in Zambia in many cases share the blame. You may like to think that road rage is something that only happens to other people, but the truth is many of us are guilty of aggressive behavior on the road. In a nutshell if you do or have ever done any of the following then you belong to the group of perpetrators:

- Regularly drive over the speed limit, or try to "beat" red lights because you are in a hurry.
- Tailgate or flash your headlights at a driver in front of you that you believe is driving too slowly
- Honk the horn often or unnecessarily
- Use obscene gestures or otherwise communicate angrily at another driver

If you have portrayed this kind of behavior on the road, it is possible you are susceptible to road rage. Many times when a road rage incident occurs it is because the person was under stress in other areas of their life.

With the increase in road infrastructure construction going on especially in Lusaka which has seen an increase in traffic congestion, this can add to stress, which may explode or escalate when it is perceived someone else on the road has acted in an aggressive way, whether intentional or not.

In some cases you may not be the actual perpetrator, but your behavior on the road could have caused others to lash out with road rage. In this case here are a few reminders of how you could have triggered road rage from other road users:

- Frequently using your phone while driving, or distracted.
- Keeping your high beams on, regardless of oncoming traffic.

- Switching lanes or making turns without using your indicator lights or turn signal
- Failing to check your blind spot before switching lanes to make sure you aren't cutting someone off

These are just a few of the pointers that may indicate that you may be contributing to causing road rage in others. Having said this, it is important to note that while a violent reaction to switching lanes without a turn signal isn't warranted, it's best to not put yourself in that situation to begin with by always being aware of other drivers and driving cautiously.

Lastly, now that we all understand what rage road is and how we may be the perpetrators or may have been playing a role in triggering it, let us look at how you can mitigate the situation in a case where we find that you have agitated another driver, whether the fault is truly yours or not, do not react or retaliate to the other driver on the road. This will only cause the situation to escalate. Remind yourself that the other driver is just bad at handling stress, avoid eye contact and continue to practice safe driving habits.

Unfortunately, it does not look like this problem is going away any time soon. All you can do is be a considerate, an aware driver that follows the rules and regulations of the road. While it may be difficult in the heat of the moment, do not give in to feelings of anger or rage on the road. Think twice before you honk the horn or flip that finger, because you never know what may set off the person in the cars around you. Getting home safely is more important than teaching someone a dangerous lesson.

Be road smart, Life is precious

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