SAFETY BENEFITS OF DRIVER EDUCATION

By: Daniel R. Mayhew and Robyn D. Robertson, Traffic Injury Research Foundation on Behalf of the Association of National Stakeholders in Traffic Safety Education (ANSTSE)

Introduction

Research in the United States and elsewhere has consistently shown teen drivers are a traffic safety priority. For every mile driven, teen drivers have crash rates 3 times higher than drivers age 20 years and older (Mayhew & Simpson, 1990; Mayhew & Simpson, 1995; Williams, 2003; McCartt, Shabanova, & Leaf, 2003; Mayhew, Singhal, Simpson, & Beirness, 2004; Helman, Grayson, & Parkes, 2010; Curry, Metzger, Williams, & Tefft, 2017). Teen drivers’ crash risk is especially high during the first few months of driving solo (Mayhew, Simpson, & Pak, 2003; Mayhew, Simpson, Singhal, & Desmond 2006; Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 2017).

Motor vehicle crashes are also one of the leading causes of death for teenagers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, October 2019). Unfortunately, teen drivers are not the only ones affected in these crashes as 2 out of 3 people killed in fatal teen crashes are people other than the teen driver (Traffic Injury Research Foundation, 2015). Young people aged 15-19 years represented 6.5% of the U.S. population in 2017 but accounted for an estimated $13.6 billion (8.4%) of the total costs of motor vehicle injuries (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018).

This paper describes the primary reasons teen drivers crash and briefly reviews recent literature suggesting driver education may offer an effective solution to address their high crash risk. In addition, the implications of these findings for improving driver education are discussed.

Reasons why teen drivers are at such high crash risk

The literature clearly establishes new teen drivers lack driving experience because they simply have not driven enough yet to fully develop the skills needed to identify and safely respond to hazards on the road (Mayhew & Simpson, 1990; Mayhew & Simpson, 1995; Harrison, 1999). But, teen drivers have an elevated crash risk not only because they are inexperienced at driving but also because of their youthfulness (McCartt, Mayhew, Braitman, Ferguson, & Simpson, 2009). Certain biological, mental, and developmental conditions during adolescence contribute to teenagers having a disproportionate crash rate (ECMT, 2006; Isler, Starkey, &
Williamson, 2009; Dobbs, 2011). Key factors (Beirness, Simpson, & Desmond, 2004; TRB, 2007; Tefft, Williams, & Grabowski, 2012; Tefft, Williams, & Grabowski, 2013) include:

- overconfidence
- sensation-seeking
- widespread sleep deprivation and fatigue
- peer influences to engage in risky driving behaviors
- intentional risky driving behaviors, such as speeding, tailgating, and distracted driving.

**Driver education offers a solution to address the high crash risk**

Early studies showed traditional driver education programs with the standard 30-hours in classroom and 6 hours in-vehicle, behind-the-wheel training, generally failed to reduce crashes (Mayhew & Simpson, 1996; Mayhew & Simpson, 1998; Mayhew & Simpson, 2002; Lonero & Mayhew, 2010; McIntyre, 2016). More recent evaluations, however, suggest contemporary programs that have updated the delivery and content of driver education including, for example, lessons on risk prevention/awareness and some form of parental involvement, show promise. The most recent state-wide evaluations in Oregon and Nebraska (Mayhew, Vanlaar, Lonero, Robertson, Marcoux, Wood, Clinton, & Simpson, 2014; Shell, Newman, Córdova-Cazar, & Heese 2015; Mayhew, Vanlaar, Lonero, Robertson, Marcoux, Wood, Clinton, & Simpson, 2017) reported reductions:

- in crashes of 5-15%; and,
- in traffic violations of 40% or more.

**Implications for Driver Education**

Results from recent research provide support for national and state efforts to improve driver education and promote enhancing programs as a strategy to reduce teen crashes and violations. Results also underscore the need to adopt driver education practices that are evidence-based and evaluate whether these program enhancements lead to better safety outcomes.

The recent scientific evidence suggests that driver education improves highway safety. Further, enhanced driver education could be a solution that would enable states to continue supporting driver education. This includes adopting and implementing the Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards (NTDETAS) developed and maintained by the Association of National Stakeholders in Traffic Safety Education (ANSTSE), teaching teens about the safety benefits and risks associated with new vehicle technology and, piloting and evaluating program enhancements.
### Calls to Action

**Driver education administrators**

- Share these positive research findings about driver education with other stakeholders, policy makers, and the media in your state.
- Go to the Association of National Stakeholders in Traffic Safety Education (ANSTSE) website and learn about ongoing state-wide activities to promote the Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards (NTDETAS) for driver education – ANSTSE, 2017; [www.anstse.info](http://www.anstse.info).
- Complete and utilize the Information Sharing System
- Adopt and implement the Administrative Standards to initiate improvements in driver education in your state.
- Request Technical Assistance for the adoption and implementation of the Administrative Standards and for making improvements in your State-wide driver education program.
- Use highway safety funds, or other funds, to conduct a NHTSA State Assessment / Peer Review based on the recommendations in the Administrative Standards. State Assessment and technical assistance reports can be found on the ANSTSE website.
- Work with ANSTSE and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to evaluate your State-wide driver education program to ensure it is meeting safety objectives.

**Driving instructors**

- Share these positive research findings about driver education with your state driver education/school administrator, other driving instructors, parents, and students.
- Go to the ANSTSE website and learn about and support ongoing efforts to promote the Administrative Standards for driver education -- [www.anstse.info](http://www.anstse.info). Resources are available such as:
  - Core Elements for Parent/Guardian Seminars
  - Instructor training materials
  - Other resources
- Encourage your state driver education administrator to adopt and implement the Administrative Standards to improve driver education in your classroom, on-line, and in-car training programs.
Calls to Action

State highway safety offices

- Share these positive research findings about driver education with other stakeholders in state government and the private sector as well as in the media.
- Go to the ANSTSE website and learn about ongoing activities to promote the Administrative Standards for driver education -- www.anstse.info.
- Use highway safety funds, or other funds, to support improvements in driver education in your state-wide driver education program.
- Encourage and support the evaluation of your State-wide driver education program to ensure it is meeting safety objectives.

References


Acknowledgements

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Knowledge of Crash Risk Factors and Self-Reported Driving Behavior: An Exploratory Analysis on a Multi-State Teen Driver Survey

By: Lisa Minjares-Kyle, M.S., MCHES®, Subashish Das, Ph.D, Gabriella Medina, M.A., Russell Henk, P.E. Texas A&M Transportation Institute, College Station, TX

Abstract: As car crashes continue to remain one of the leading causes of injury and death for young people across the nation, efforts to better understand and address this issue must continue to be a focus of the traffic safety community. One such effort and the feature of this article, includes findings from a multi-year survey from a peer-to-peer program known as Teens in the Driver Seat®. The analysis showed interesting results in terms of what teens identified as risk factors vs. what teens self-reported when driving or riding in the car. The analysis also compared early licensed teens to non-restricted teen drivers, saw significant differences in driving behavior, and compared across genders to identify interesting trends related to teen crash risk factors. Analysis of the teen driver surveys remains ongoing.

It is important to look back to continue to try and understand the many factors that contribute to car crashes remaining one of the leading cause of injury and death for our nation’s youth over the past 20 years (NCIPC, 2019; IIHS, 2018). Annually, the nation loses an average of 2,700 teens every year or the equivalent of 7 teens every day (IIHS, 2018). While this is a significant improvement compared to 20 years ago, the U.S. continues to lose more people to car crashes than any other nation for a “crash death rate of 10.3 per 100,000 population” (Sauber-Schatz, Ederer, Dellinger & Baldwin, 2016, p.673). Teen drivers, in particular, are at a higher risk for crashes primarily because of driver inexperience and maybe a higher likelihood of engaging in risky driving behaviors while also being more likely to underestimate risk (Sauber-Schatz et al., 2016).

Efforts to reduce teen crashes have resulted in the development and implementation of Graduated Driver’s Licensing (GDL), which has been shown to have a positive effect on teen crash rates but can be hindered through lack of enforcement, non-compliance with restrictions and the use of minimum standards over best practices (McCartt, Teoh, Fields, Bratman & Hellinga, 2010; AAA, 2006). Combining GDL with other interventions has been shown to have a significant impact on teen crashes compared to states that do not have an additional intervention and one such intervention is the focus of this article (Henk & Fette, 2009).

Developed in 2003 within the state of Texas, a countermeasure known as Teens in the Driver Seat® (TDS) was created to utilize grassroots intervention of peer-to-peer outreach, which focuses on 5 main contributing risk factors to teen deaths due to crashes based on research and crash data:

1. driving distracted (cell phones and other peer passengers),
2. driving at night/drowsy driving,
3. speeding/racing,
4. not wearing a seat belt and
5. impaired driving
Peer-to-Peer education has shown significant impacts on high-risk behaviors such as teen pregnancy and drug abuse (Tindall & Black, 2009). The program design both “augments” and “compliments” GDL restriction laws and have been shown to provide a significant improvement in teen crash frequencies (Henk & Fette, 2009).

Summarized in this article are highlights from an analysis of the TDS program’s comprehensive Teen Driving Experiences Survey administered during 2007-2016. The analysis included survey responses from 11 states, which encompassed 109,622 surveys. States included in the analysis are as follows: Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, Nebraska, Connecticut, California, Colorado, Oklahoma, New Mexico, New York and Pennsylvania. At the time of analysis, 52% of the population surveyed were female and grade distribution was evenly distributed with roughly 25% of the sampling size representing each grade level (freshman through senior) across the entire dataset.

Forty-four percent of the sample reported having some form of licensure at varying stages within the GDL timeline. The three most common GDL phases include a learner’s permit, which requires supervised driving with an adult over the age of 21 at all times, a provisional or intermediate license period, which restricts high-risk driving situations (such as driving at night, phone use or peer passengers), and an unrestricted license which grants drivers full privileges. Among licensed drivers, a majority of teens had a learner’s permit while 16% had a provisional license and 14% had an unrestricted license.

Self-Reported Driving Behaviors

Teen respondents were asked to report on driving and passenger habits within the past 30 days for thirteen behaviors related to the five focus areas of the program and the frequency in which they engaged in the behavior. For example, how often have you done the following in the past month? Talked on a cell phone while driving: never, some (1-5 times), a lot (more than 5 times). Figures 1 and 2 highlight the top five most frequently reported behaviors for the “a lot” and “some” frequencies.

Notable findings showed:

- A significant number of teens riding or driving with other teens, without an adult being present (26.5% [a lot] and 28% [some]).
- Riding without a seat belt was among the most commonly reported behaviors for teen passengers (17% [a lot] and 30% [some]) compared to less than 8% of teen drivers.
- Twenty-four percent of teens drove frequently after 10 pm without an adult.
Fourteen percent of teens frequently drove 10 mph over the speed limit.

Cell phone use was also among some of the top reported behaviors with albeit less frequency (between 1-5 times). Nearly 23% of teens self-reported talking on a cell phone while driving and 20% texting while driving.

While crash data shows high level of young driver involvement in speed related crashes, teens in the survey sample reported low levels of involvement in street racing with 77% self-reporting “never” participating in it in the past 30 days. More information is needed to provide further clarification on what teens consider an act of street racing as overall, there were a significant number of teens who self-reported driving frequently over 10 mph. In addition, 75% of teens reported “never” having driven drowsy while also not identifying it as a potential risk factor. More information is needed regarding what teens may identify as “drowsy driving” thus future iterations of the survey have focused on identifying how much sleep teens receive and providing more specific metrics related to drowsy driving such as “driving when my eye lids feel heavy”. Lastly, the largest portion of the sample self-reported never driving after drinking alcohol (81%) within the past 30 days. While we know that teen involvement in alcohol-impaired driving crashes has decreased over the years, research has shown them to be 17x more likely to be involved in a crash after drinking alcohol compared to their older counterparts (18-25) (IIHS, 2019).

In Figure 3, findings from a separate analysis examined self-reported behaviors based on licensing status (unrestricted, provisional, restricted, and no license).

In the same behavior areas (teen passengers, seat belt use, cell phones, speeding, and nighttime driving) unlicensed license holders consistently self-reported higher levels of engaging in those driving habits compared to all other teens. This is in striking contrast to another notable finding showing that unlicensed drivers had the lowest levels of engaging in these behaviors, compared to all licensed drivers. These results warrant further exploration as research has found young unlicensed drivers to be more likely involved in fatal crashes and engage in high-risk driving behaviors (Fu, Anderson, Dziura, Crowley & Vaca, 2012). As increasing number of teens are waiting to receive their license (Henderson, 2017) information on identifying their driving partners, habits and perception of risk are important to capture the constantly evolving driving culture of youth across the country.

Many states during this time, such as Texas and Georgia, transitioned from a 1-year provisional period to extended restrictions until the age of 18. States such as Colorado, North Carolina, and Nebraska for
example continue to have 6-12 months or until the individual turns 18. Research has shown that teens who are restricted for longer periods tend to experience fewer crashes than those who transition quickly into unrestricted licenses highlighting the continued need for dialogue regarding extended GDL (Mayhew, Simpson & Pak, 2003).

In addition, car crashes continue to be the leading cause of death for young adults until the age of 25 (NCIPC, 2019). How are states addressing the growing number of teens who are postponing getting their license and therefore falling outside GDL restrictions? Outside of New Jersey, who has extended their GDL with positive results, many state’s GDL periods can miss teens who wait until the age 18 to obtain their license. One effort to address this gap includes the development of a collegiate peer-to-peer program, U in the Driver Seat, within the state of Texas but there is significantly more work left to drive down crash rates for that age group.

**Perceived Risk Factors**

A teen’s perception of risk typically involves teen measuring or estimating a certain level of risk for a particular driving behavior and understanding these perceptions can provide insight into their likelihood of engaging in that risky behavior as well as provide potential avenues of intervention for educators (Simons-Morton et al., 2016). Students within the survey listed their perceived five main contributing factors to teen crashes using their own terms and descriptions, which researchers then categorized. Figure 4 shows a heat chart representing the 20 most frequently cited terms for Risk 1 to Risk 4, (Risk 5 was removed due to several missing or hard to distinguish answers). The darker red color indicates a higher percentage of usage while the lighter color indicates a lower percentage.

Findings showed that teens identified “Drinking”, “Text”, “Phone”, “Seatbelt” and “Speed” as main contributing factors to teen crashes, yet four of these five categories were also among the most reported behaviors teens engaged in, identifying a significant discrepancy between risk knowledge behavior and the continued need for intervention. Contrary to other risks, driving impaired was the least self-reported behavior among teens implying that they recognize the high level of risk involved with this behavior and thus may choose not to engage in it.

Risks relating to teen passengers was among the bottom 10 reported risk factors with lower frequencies than “carelessness”, “sleep” or “eating”. In addition, nighttime related risks such as “sleep”, “tired”, and
“light” were less frequently listed despite nighttime being one of the major contributors to teen crashes and one of the behaviors in which they self-report engaging in frequently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Risk 2</th>
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<td>24.07</td>
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<td>text</td>
<td>29.31</td>
<td>16.44</td>
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<td>phone</td>
<td>12.07</td>
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<td>7.26</td>
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Figure 4: Heat chart of most frequently cited risk factors

**Gender Differences**

Researchers also examined gender to identify any differences in what were considered top risk factors for each group as depicted in Figure 5. Both genders identified “drinking” and cell phone related distractions (such as “phone” and “text”) as contributing factors to crashes. After “drinking”, males primarily identified risks related to “text”, “speed”, “drug(s)” and “sleep” and females identified “phone”, “music,” “friends”, and “passengers” among the top contributing risks factors for crashes.

Research has shown that not only are teen passenger combinations dangerous but significantly more so for male-to-male passenger combinations (Simons-Morton et al., 2016; Fu & Wilmont, 2008). In addition, while the literature on gender differences on drugged driving is sparse, surveys on drug use across the nation have shown that males are more likely to drive under the influence of drugs (CBHSQ, 2015).
Conclusion

Ideally, the hope is that by recognizing a risk and perceiving it to be dangerous, teens will be less likely or willing to engage in those behaviors but as this and many other studies have shown, the results are mixed. On one hand, teens identify drinking as the biggest risk for driving and report low levels of engaging in this behavior yet, in the same sample, engage in cell phone use despite recognizing the risks. We also see gaps related to nighttime driving and teen passengers with low levels of recognition and high levels in engaging in these activities.

Graduated driver’s licensing has made significant improvements for teen crash rates but it is not the only solution. In recent years, many programs have begun adopting a health model approach, which utilizes a proven theory of behavior to better understand and predict driving motivations (Ledesma, Tosi, Díaz-Lázaro & Poó, 2018; Barzargan-Hejzazi et al., 2016). Efforts should continue to understand influences on teen driving such as family, social norms and relationships. These insights can then be utilized by educators to focus on those related lifestyles in an effort to curb risky driving habits.

Programs such as TDS will continue to adapt the peer-to-peer model approach to address teens at the individual, interpersonal and organizational level related to creating a traffic safety culture. In 2018, the TDS survey was revised to include attitude, marijuana use, and social media use behind the wheel. Analysis will be forthcoming as data is collected. For more information on the TDS program, please visit www.t-driver.com.

With these continued improvements and efforts across the nation, we can eventually achieve zero deaths. Until that day, let us recognize that with 286 fewer teen lives lost on our roadways in 2018, the lowest number we have seen in decades, 2,769 teen lives were lost affecting thousands of families across our nation and confirming that more needs to be done (IIHS, 2018).
Limitations

The authors would like to recognize limitations of this analysis including the small sampling sizes from various states. In addition, distribution was not randomized and focused on schools with the TDS program, thus the application is limited.

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References:

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