Risky Behaviors in Teenage Motor Vehicle Occupants

Vermont Kid Health Improvement Program (VCHIP)

E. Nelson1, K. Keating1, T. Delaney1, S. McEwing1, E. Hunt2, E. Munene2, J. Shaw1

1VCHIP, Pediatrics, University of Vermont College of Medicine, Burlington, VT, 2Vermont Children’s Hospital at Fletcher Allen Health Care, Burlington, VT, 3Vermont Department of Health, Burlington, VT, United States

Background

Motor vehicle (MV) occupant injuries are the leading cause of teen death in Vermont and the US. Knowing the range of driving-related risky behaviors and concerns that teens themselves report can inform efforts to reduce crash risk. Note: Vermont law allows learner permit (LP) at age 15, Jr. license (JL) at 16, full license (FL) at 18. The seatbelt law is “secondary enforcement” after age 15.

Objectives

- Ascertain teens’ behaviors, perceptions, and concerns about driving and riding in MVs, as reported in primary care (PC) offices
- Explore the influence of gender, age, license status, and urban vs. rural driving location and on risk-taking.

Methods

- Anonymous questionnaire, self-administered by a convenience sample of 15-19 yr-olds in Vermont PC offices (14 pediatric, 2 family medicine sites). Questionnaire was pilot-tested and modified in 3 focus group meetings with 15-19 yr-olds
- 488 questionnaires were returned by 15-19 yr-olds vs. 488
- 11% of teens refused participation
- X2 tests used to evaluate differences among subgroups, alpha < .01

Analysis

- 46% male vs. 54% female
- 46% younger teens (15-16 y) vs. 52% older teens (17-19 y)
- 93% white, 2% Asian, 2% African American, 1% Hispanic, 1% Native American
- 21% no license, 28% Learner’s Permit, 27% Jr. Operators, 23% Operators
- 54% urban, 46% rural drivers
- Respondents most often drive: 68% cars, 16% SUVs, 8% minivans, 7% pickup trucks, 1% motorcycles

Sample Characteristics

- All Respondents (n=488)
- Drivers Only (n=388)

HOW OFTEN DO...

For all comparisons in BOLD, p<.01

Summary

- Despite worry about their own and friends’ driving safety, many 15-19 yr-olds in Vermont PC offices self-report risky behaviors in MVs, and more than 60% of those ≥ 18 y have had a crash or moving violation
- Risky behaviors are especially prevalent among older teen drivers and those who report having had a crash or ticket
- While teenage drivers in Vermont differ little by urban/rural location or by gender, males do report higher rates of driving after substance use or when sleepy

Implications

- Efforts to reduce risk should go beyond advice to buckle up and avoid substance use; behavior as passengers should also be addressed
- Intervention efforts should address the rise in risky driving seen as teens age and advance in license status
- Teens with a history of crashes may require more intensive preventive interventions
- Teens should be encouraged to speak up to peers who are driving unsafely

Next Steps

- VCHIP is exploring ways to improve screening and counseling of teens in primary care practices around driving safety