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TITLE: The Teen-Aged Driver

DATE: February 1965

AUTHOR(S): Gareth S. Ferdun, Ronald S. Coppin & Raymond C. Peck

REPORT NUMBER: 21

NTIS NUMBER: PB-218987

FUNDING SOURCE: Departmental Budget

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

To examine the accident and conviction records of teenaged drivers to determine whether or not a change in the licensing age was warranted and whether or not behind-the-wheel driver training was effective in reducing accidents and convictions.

SUMMARY:

A sample of 10,000 teenagers was surveyed and data on miles driven, driving record, driving experience, and driver training were collected and analyzed. It was found that, in terms of driving record alone (mileage uncontrolled), accidents were unrelated to the age of the teenager. Violations, on the other hand, increased with age. In terms of driving performance (driver record controlled for mileage differences) accidents decreased with age but violations continued to increase. For males, age (maturity) was found to be a more dominant factor than experience with respect to driving performance. For females, the converse was true—driving experience was the more important factor.

In terms of absolute risk, the authors could find no evidence to support raising the minimum licensing age in California. In terms of relative risk there was some evidence (for males that younger drivers are more predisposed to accidents than are drivers in the later teens. However, the authors felt that this relationship was possibly a function of experience, and that delaying licensing to 18 would merely postpone the learning experience.

The sample of teenaged drivers was broken into three groups (did take, didn't take, and couldn't take) on the basis of their answer to the questionnaire item regarding the completion of a behind-the-wheel training course. (It must be remembered, the report notes, that youths who elect to take driver training may have atypical personal characteristics.) When the three groups were compared the trained group had fewer violations, but no significant differences were found between the trained and untrained groups on accidents. The authors concluded that although it is entirely possible that some programs in certain individual school districts are effective, this finding raises serious questions about the general effectiveness of statewide driver training in reducing accidents.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The legislature subsequently increased the minimum licensing age to 18, unless the applicant has completed an approved on-road driver training program. This legislation did not evolve from the findings of the study.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Published as "The Teen-Aged Driver-An Evaluation of Age, Experience, Driving Exposure and Driver Training as They Relate to Driving Record" in *Highway Research Record*, 163, 31-53, 1967. Also see Harrington, Report #38; Peck (1985), *Alcohol Drugs & Driving*, 1(1-2), 45-61; and Peck (1996), *Effectiveness of novice driver education*, unpublished paper.