

Safe Driving Attitudes and Behaviors Among Vermont Student Drivers

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Background

Distracted driving contributes to approximately 10% of all driver fatalities and 17% of injuries in the US¹. Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens in the US². Drivers aged 16-19 are 3 times more likely to be involved in fatal crashes than those ≥ 20 years². Increased teen risk is related to attachment to technology, limited driving experience, and an illusion of invincibility³. Previous National Highway Traffic Safety Administration assessment of distracted driving attitudes and behaviors does not include significant data on teenage drivers⁶. The goal of this project is to assess safe driving attitudes and behaviors among Vermont Student Drivers.

Methods

A 25-item New Driver Perspectives and Behavior Survey was developed and collected data on driver attitudes on speeding, cell phone use, alcohol, marijuana, and seatbelt use while driving. A 5-point Likert scale was used to group students based on indicated perceived risk of the driving behaviors. Students who marked 1-2 were categorized as “student felt unsafe” and “perceived the consequences of the risky driving behavior as likely”. On the other end of the rating scale, students who marked 3-5 were categorized as “student felt safe” and “perceived the consequences of the risky driving behavior as unlikely”. Surveys were administered using a convenience sample of new drivers participating in a driver’s education program in 5 Vermont high schools:

- 1 class from Burlington High School
- 2 classes from Champlain Valley Union (CVU) High School
- 2 classes from Mount Mansfield Union (MUU) High School

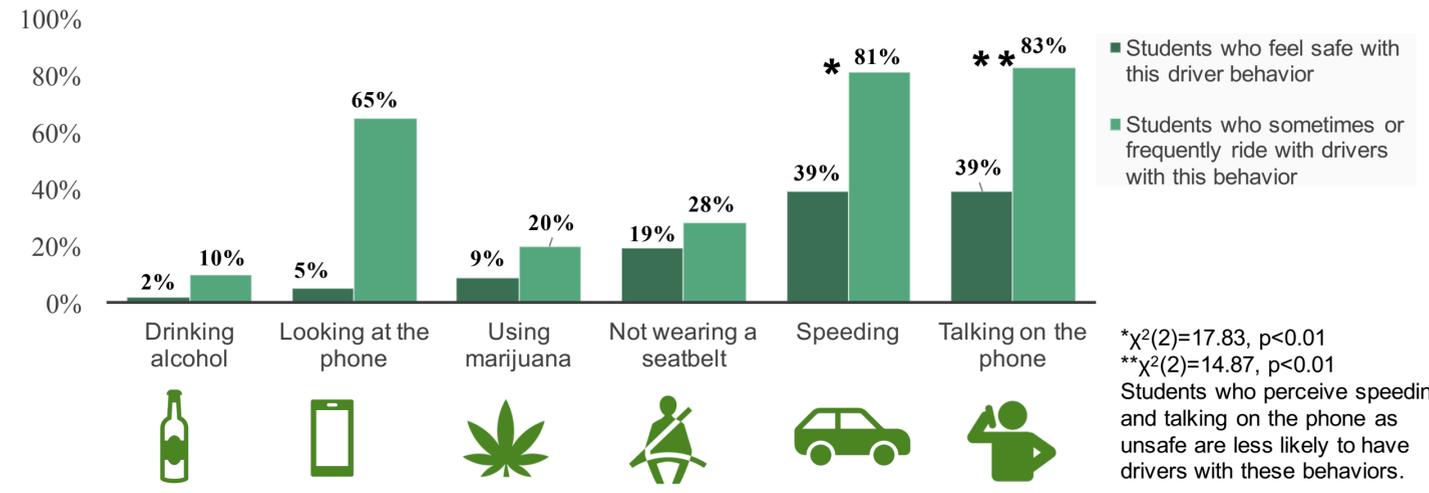
A total of 134 student surveys was completed (N=134). A Chi-squared test was used to analyze the data (p-value of $p < 0.05$). Gender-based results were normalized to accommodate gender in order to represent an expected 50:50 distribution of gender.

Survey Demographics

Location: Burlington (34.33%), MMU (34.99%), CVU (30.52%)
 Gender: Female (44.78%), Male (55.22%)
 Age: 16 (78.69%), 17 (18.85%), 18 (2.4%), 19 (.8%), 23 (.8%)
 Permit status: No permit (.75%), permit (99.25%)

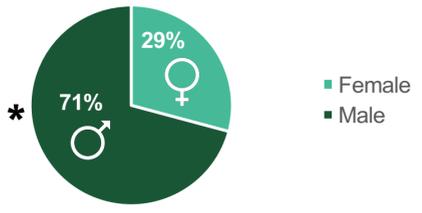
Results

Students’ perception of safety vs. students’ reported frequency of driver behavior

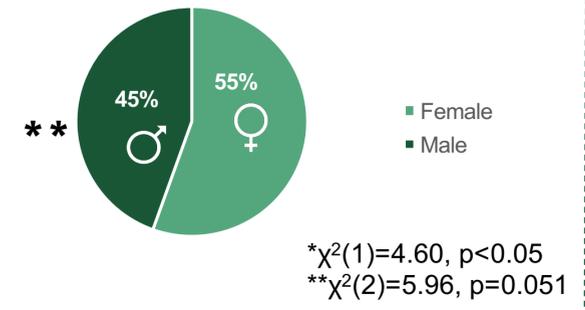


Gender Differences

Students who think it is unlikely to get injured in a crash while the driver is speaking on the phone



Students who sometimes or frequently ride with drivers who are looking at the phone



Representative Comments

Of the 22 students who wrote safety suggestions:

- 6 mentioned marijuana use.
- 6 suggested that more reminders about risks are needed.
- 2 indicated that they feel driving after using marijuana is safe.

“Really show people how dangerous it is to be without a seatbelt”	“Really enforce texting and driving”	“You can drive while high”
“Tell folks to plan ahead”	STUDENT SUGGESTIONS	“My friends drive high and I’m fine”
“Let kids know it is stupid to drive high”	“Reminders about risks”	“I think the state should start a more aggressive, graphic ad campaign”

Discussion

Many young drivers perceive speeding and speaking on the phone as low-risk driving behaviors. They also perceive driving under the influence of marijuana as more acceptable than driving under the influence of alcohol, despite similar consequences. The Vermont 2018 Highway Safety Plan addresses marijuana use in a target population of Vermont drivers ages 18+, failing to include the typical student driver population. Their survey noted that 1.6% of adult drivers reported driving after using marijuana, in contrast to 20% reported by youth drivers using our survey tool. Gender may impact risk perception and prevalence of risky driving behaviors.

Future Directions

This is a pilot study of a tool that will be used for statewide assessments of safe driving attitudes and behaviors. Future use of this survey tool will capture data from larger sample sizes to represent a broader picture of driver attitudes in Vermont. Our results can help guide future efforts to improve upon 5 of the 7 “Critical Emphasis Areas” (CEAs) identified in the Vermont 2018 Highway Safety Plan. Additionally, our survey tool may be relevant to help guide efforts outlined in the recently released in the Governor’s Marijuana Advisory Commission Final Recommendations, which emphasize marijuana and other drug impaired driving in Vermont youths.

References

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