



Research report N° 2017-T-04-SEN

Thematic File Road Safety N° 12

Young people (15-24)



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Goldenbeld, C., Nuyttens, N., Temmerman T. (2018) Dossier thématique sécurité routière n° 12 – Jeunes (15-24 ans), Bruxelles, Belgique : Institut Vias – Centre de Connaissance Sécurité routière

Summary

Problem and causes

From 2006 to 2015, more than 52,000 young people aged 18 to 24 lost their lives on the roads. That is 16% of all road deaths in the EU (EC, 2017a). Furthermore, the number of road deaths in this age bracket fell by 52% over 10 years. During the same period, the number of road deaths among people aged 15 to 17 declined by 57%. As of 2015, this group represented 2.3% of all road fatalities.

The way in which young people behave on the road defines their exposure to danger and risk of road crashes. In addition, young motorists often drive under conditions that raise the risk of road crashes and injury, even for experienced drivers. Young drivers tend to have relatively old cars, that have fewer passive and active safety features. Furthermore, they tend to drive in poor light conditions (particularly at night on weekends).

Young, inexperienced drivers are over-represented in single-vehicle road crashes (i.e., crashes where only 1 vehicle is involved). These crashes occur after losing control of the vehicle, at night, not at intersections, outside built-up areas, and at intersections where the driver is making a left turn. The risk factors that may play a role in these crashes include the following: lack of experience, risky driving behaviours (speed, fatigue, distraction, alcohol), driving behaviour adversely affected by emotions, and driving behaviour influenced by passengers.

Age, gender, and experience (or lack thereof) create a dangerous cocktail in some young drivers; some young drivers are at a greater risk. The reasons for these phenomena are very complex. There is a large number of factors involved that together have an effect on each other:

- physiological and emotional development,
- personality,
- lifestyle,
- examples set by parents and friends (social environment and social influence)
- the socioeconomic circumstances of an individual (vehicles that are older and less safe), and
- not enough driving experience.

Certain personality types, such as people who are "thrill seekers", are at a higher risk of being involved in road crashes. Social influence, including peer pressure, can affect a person's driving behaviour, as well as role models (parents) or people close to the young drivers.

Development in young people

According to recent research, the parts of the brain responsible for repressing impulses and assessing the consequences of certain types of behaviour do not develop until well after a person's teenage years. This brain development may have an effect on driving behaviour. Different levels of testosterone may also partly explain differences in behaviour between young men and young women.

Key figures for Belgium

The figures for road deaths of 15 to 24 year-olds Belgians and road crash involvement are in line with European and international statistics. The majority of these young traffic deaths are adults (86%), male (80%), and car passengers (69%). The fatal accidents they are involved in occur relatively often at night (51%), not at intersections (84%), and outside built-up areas (53%). More than half (54%) of the crashes implicate only a single vehicle. This type of road crashes is caused frequently by excessive speed and losing control of the vehicle.

Young drivers were asked about the types of dangerous behaviours that they engage in while driving. 69% admitted to speeding outside built-up areas "every now and then" or "daily". On motorways and within built-up areas, this percentage is 59%. This makes excessive speed one of the most frequent types of dangerous behaviour committed by young drivers. Most young drivers have admitted to driving when tired (66%). They also reported the following types of behaviour about themselves (in order of the frequency of behaviour): using hands-free phone while behind the wheel (32%), using phone while behind the wheel (18%), driving after drinking alcohol (23%), not wearing a seatbelt in the car (8%), and driving after taking illegal drugs, sleeping tablets or tranquillisers (2%).

When it comes to possible policy measures for increasing road safety, young Belgian drivers support an alcohol lock for repeat offenders (77%), a zero tolerance for alcohol for novice drivers (70%), and a zero tolerance for alcohol for all drivers (53%). In comparison with other young European drivers, Belgians are less vocal in their support for mandatory winter tyres, a penalty or demerit point system, and the compulsory to wear a helmet while riding a bicycle.

Countermeasures

The safety of young people on the road can be enhanced by introducing structured measures that give impulsive behaviour less of an opportunity and not exposing young drivers to complex traffic situations too soon. These measures should give young drivers the time to gain the experience that they need under safe conditions and to develop skills that enable them to avoid risky behaviour.

To reduce the high risk of accidents among young road-users, the government could take measures in the following areas (Vlakveld, 2005):

- Driving test
- Education and training
- Graduated driver licencing system and accompanied driving
- Special rules for young people
- Information and campaigns
- In-vehicle driver behaviour feedback
- Using the social environment

Driving test

This measure is about improving the driving test. In some countries, the driving test has been extended to include a risk perception test.

Education and training

Measures in this area include improving initial driver training (in order to gain a driving licence), as well as special courses for novice drivers. This measure may also include using other learning tools (such as a driving simulator) to improve the quality of driving instructions.

Graduated driver licensing system and accompanied driving

With graduated driver licensing systems, the driver's training consists mainly of gaining experience behind the wheel in conditions where the likelihood of getting into a crash is kept as small as possible. At the initial stage, young, novice drivers are only allowed to drive while accompanied by experienced drivers. When they are allowed to drive on their own, restrictions such as not driving at night and not carrying passengers should be applied. The purpose of graduated driver licensing systems is less on formal driving lessons and tests and more on building up experience in low-risk environments.

Special rules for young people

Some countries have restrictions for young or inexperienced drivers. For instance, in some countries a very low alcohol limit applies for novice drivers. In many countries with graduated driver license systems in place, young drivers are not allowed to drive during the hours of darkness or to carry passengers. A penalty or demerit point system aimed at young drivers may also contribute to safer driving behaviour.

Information and campaigns

This includes campaigns that especially target young and inexperienced drivers. One well-known example is the 'BOB' designated driver campaign, which is used each year in many European countries.

In-vehicle driver behaviour feedback

This measure is intended to prevent risky driving behaviour by inexperienced drivers (and often their parents) with feedback of the driver's unsafe behaviour while driving. The vehicle is equipped with a system that gives real-time feedback about the way the car is being driven. At a later stage, the system provides a summary of a person's driving behaviour over a period of time.

Using the social environment

Making young drivers drive safely is not just a matter for the young people themselves, but also for their parents, their schools, their ability to go out (at night), and their employers. These are measures designed to involve these influences to make them jointly accountable. For example, their parents play the role of driving companions while they learn to drive by .

System-based approach

Finally, various measures need to be included in a system-based approach to target young drivers or at their social environment. For this, organisations on the same level (e.g., federal government departments) need to exchange information and meet the needs of young drivers both horizontally and vertically (from the local level to the regional level, and on to the federal level).

