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Parental perceptions of teen driving: Restrictions, worry and influence[☆]

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1. Introduction

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens in the United States (U.S.) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Among teen drivers, driver inexperience is a leading cause of fatal motor vehicle crashes (CDC, 2014; Insurance Institute for Highway Safety: Highway Loss Data Institute. Teenagers: 2013, 2015). Teen crash rates are highest during the first months after licensure (Chapman, Masten, & Browning, 2014; McCart, Shabanova, & Leaf, 2003) and decline with increasing age and driver experience (Curry, Pfeiffer, Durbin, & Elliott, 2015; Insurance Institute for Highway Safety: Highway Loss Data Institute. Teenagers: 2013, 2015; Williams, 2003).

Parent imposed rules and limits can reduce the risk of teen crashes or other negative driving outcomes (Moreno, 2014; Simons-Morton, Hartos, Leaf, & Preusser, 2006). However, research on how parental perceptions and concerns regarding teen driver safety relate to parental supervision and monitoring of their teen drivers is limited. Therefore, we examined these topics among parents of learner teen drivers and newly licensed teens.

2. Methods

We analyzed a subset of the data from the 2013 *Summer ConsumerStyles* online panel survey administered by Porter Novelli (Washington, D.C.). *ConsumerStyles* measures health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of adults in the U.S. Participants were recruited using both random-digit dial and address-based sampling methods (GfK, 2013). The survey was conducted online; if needed, households were provided with a laptop computer and access to the Internet. The survey was fielded from June 28–July 26, 2013 to 4497 adults (18 years or older) and a supplemental sample of 1608 adults with children ages 12–17 who had completed the 2013 spring wave of the survey (GfK, 2013). A total of 4033 adults completed the *Summer ConsumerStyles*, for a reported response rate of 66% (GfK, 2013).

For this study, participants were restricted to parents with learning to drive or newly licensed teens ages 15–18 years ($N = 456$), 61% of whom were from the supplemental sample. The unweighted data were analyzed because the weights were based on the overall survey sample, and the demographic characteristics of participants from the study sample differed from those of respondents from the overall sample. Respondents who answered “not specified” or “refused” to a question were excluded (2% of total sample) by *ConsumerStyles*. The survey methods are described in greater detail elsewhere (GfK, 2013).

[☆] Disclaimer: The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Survey respondents were asked if they had a son or daughter between the ages of 15 and 18 who was currently learning to drive or had obtained a driver's license within the last 12 months. Respondents who answered yes to either of those questions were asked four follow-up questions: 1) "Do you have rules or restrictions for your teen driver in any of the following areas?" Respondents were allowed to select more than one answer from the following choices: safety belt use, drinking and driving, cell phone use while driving, and text messaging while driving; 2) "How much do you worry about your teen's safety when he or she is driving?"; 3) "How much influence do you think parental rules have on preventing a teen driver from being involved in a car crash?" Response options for questions 2 and 3 were "a lot," "somewhat," "not very much," or "not at all"; and 4) "Do you and your teen currently have, or have ever had a written agreement, sometimes called a parent-teen contract or agreement, that states or stated your teen's driving privileges, restrictions and rules, and consequences for breaking the rules?" Response options were "not applicable, has a learner's permit," "no longer have an agreement, but had when teen first received license," "never had," "currently have," and "don't know." Responses for question four were condensed for newly licensed drivers as "ever had," "never had," or "don't know."

Demographic variables included age of respondent, education, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, marital status, metropolitan statistical area, and Census region. Crude prevalence ratios were calculated to assess for any association between each of the demographic variables and each of the four teen driving questions. Associations were considered to be statistically significant if the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) did not overlap. Counts, percentages, and 95% CIs were calculated for teen driving questions, both overall and by teen's driving licensure status (learning to drive or obtained a driver's license). Lastly, we ran separate log-linear regression models to explore whether imposing all four rules on teen drivers was associated with either worry intensity ("a lot" versus "somewhat, not very much or not at all") or perceived influence of parental rules ("a lot" versus "somewhat, not very much or not at all"). Responses to each of the three variables were dichotomized because some response categories for each variable had cell sizes <20. All analyses were completed using SPSS version 23 (IBM Armonk, NY).

3. Results

Ninety percent of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 59, 61% were female, and 74% were White, non-Hispanic (Table 1). Bivariate analyses showed that none of the demographic characteristics was statistically significantly associated with any of the teen driving questions.

Of the 456 parents who responded "yes" to having a driving teen, 268 (59%) had a son or daughter who was learning to drive and 188 (41%) had a son or daughter who was licensed within the last 12 months (Table 2).

Overall, 51% of parents reported worrying for their teen's safety "a lot" while the teen was driving. Worrying "a lot" was reported less frequently by parents of newly licensed teens (36%, 95% CI: 29–43) compared with parents of learning teens (61%, 95% CI: 55–67) (Table 2).

Overall, 37% (95% CI: 33–42) of respondents thought that parental rules have "a lot" of influence on preventing a teen driver from being in a motor vehicle crash. A higher percentage of parents with learning teens thought that parental rules have "a lot" of influence on preventing a teen driver from being in a crash (42%, 95% CI: 36–48) than parents of licensed teens (31%, 95% CI: 24–37), but the 95% CIs overlapped (Table 2).

Overall, 91% of parents reported that they had at least one rule or restriction for their teen driver regarding safety belt use, drinking and driving, cell phone use while driving, or text messaging while driving; 80% of parents reported having rules or restrictions for all four driving behaviors. Parents of licensed teens reported slightly lower percentages of rules or restrictions compared with parents of learning teens, but the 95% CIs overlapped in each instance. Among parents of licensed teens, 9% (95% CI: 7–11) reported having a written parent-teen driving agreement, either currently or in the past (data not shown). Parents who worried "a lot" were three times as likely to place all four restrictions on their teen (PR = 3.1, 95% CI: 2.0–4.8) compared with parents who worried "somewhat," "not very much" or "not at all" (Table 3). Parents who reported their rules having "a lot" of influence were nearly twice as likely to place all four restrictions on their teen (PR = 1.8, 95% CI: 1.2–2.7) compared with parents who did not report "a lot" of influence ("somewhat," "not very much," or "not at all") (Table 3).

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of parents with learning and licensed teen drivers, *ConsumerStyles* 2013, N = 456.

Characteristic	Count	% (95% CI) ^a
Age		
18–29	19	4 (2–6)
30–44	154	34 (29–38)
45–59	257	56 (52–61)
60+	26	6 (4–8)
Education		
Less than high school	18	4 (2–6)
High school graduate	88	19 (16–23)
Some college	157	34 (30–39)
Bachelor's degree or higher	193	42 (38–47)
Gender		
Male	180	39 (35–44)
Female	276	61 (56–65)
Race/ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	337	74 (70–78)
Black, non-Hispanic	37	8 (6–11)
Other, non-Hispanic	32	7 (5–9)
Hispanic	50	11 (8–14)
Household income		
Less than \$25,000	45	10 (7–13)
\$25,000 to \$74,999	210	46 (41–51)
\$75,000 to \$124,999	142	31 (27–35)
\$125,000 +	59	13 (10–16)
Marital status		
Married	354	78 (74–81)
Not married	102	22 (19–26)
MSA		
Non-metro	62	14 (10–17)
Metro	394	86 (83–90)
Region		
Northeast	57	13 (9–16)
Midwest	122	27 (23–31)
South	166	36 (32–41)
West	111	24 (20–28)

^a CI: confidence interval.

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