Prevalence of Driving Distractions among High School Student Drivers in Three Canadian Cities

November 17, 2011
Vancouver, BC
Introduction

- In Canada
  - Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of injury for Canadian youth ages 15 to 19

- Graduated Drivers’ Licensing (GDL) has been introduced in several Canadian Provinces

- 2 stages: Learner and Novice – 12 mo. each stage

- DRIVING RESTRICTIONS AND CONDITIONS (BC):
  - Zero BAC level while driving
  - No driving between midnight and 5 a.m.
  - Limit of 1 passenger, unless supervisor who is 25 years or older
  - Refrain from driving highways or expressways
  - Mandatory display of ‘L’ or ‘N’ sign/plate when driving
  - Other restrictions (e.g. Not permitted to use cell phones)
Purpose of the Study

- To assess the prevalence of compliance with GDL rules and driving distractions among high school students in three Canadian cities (Halifax NS, Barrie ON & Vancouver BC) representing different geographic, socioeconomic, and jurisdictional settings.
Methods

- High schools in each city were identified using two sources:
  - School board websites
  - DMTI, a company which partners with universities to disseminate spatial data

- Schools were classified into income tertiles based on the after-tax income of their neighbourhood census tract, according to 2006 census

- All high schools in Barrie and Halifax were included

- In Vancouver, a random selection, stratified by income level, was used
Methods

- 30-minute observations were made by trained observers of high school drivers leaving school at the end of the school day during May and June of 2009 and 2010.

Vancouver, BC (stratified random sample)

Barrie, ON (all city high schools)

Halifax, NS (all city high schools)
Methods

- Driver:
  - Sex
  - Seatbelt use
  - Passengers
  - Distractions:
    - cell phone
    - loud music
    - eating/drinking
    - smoking

Results

Table 1: Number of schools and drivers observed (2009 and 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Barrie</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Drivers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>118</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>422</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lowest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>415</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1,283</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Overall, males - 756 (58.9%)
females - 515 (40.1%)
unknown - 12 (1.0%)
# Results – Seat Belt Use

## Table 2: Number of drivers wearing a seatbelt (2009 and 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Barrie</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>98.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>98.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>98.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, 
- males - 714 (94.5%)  
- females - 489 (95.0%)  
- unknown - 11 (0.5%)
Results - Passengers

Table 3a: Number of drivers with passengers (2009 and 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drivers</th>
<th>Passengers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>544</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>482</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>3 or more</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3b: Proportion of drivers with passengers by city

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mean # Passengers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrie</td>
<td>98.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Results – Driver Distractions

Table 4: Number of drivers with at least one distraction (2009 and 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Barrie</th>
<th>Honda</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Effect of Sex:
  - Overall: males - 141 (18.6%) : females - 64 (12.4%)
- Varied by city:
  - Barrie: 22.5% : 13.7%
  - Halifax: 9.1% : 10.1%
  - Vancouver: 30.1% : 30.1%
Results – Nature of the Distraction

- Overall, 210 drivers (16.4%) had at least one driving distraction
- Of these:
  - Most common distraction: Loud music - 114 drivers (54.3%)
  - Second most common: Cell phone - 94 drivers (44.8%)
  - Third most common: Smoking - 25 drivers (12.1%)

- Vancouver had the highest proportion of drivers with at least one driving distraction: 116 of 210 (55.2%)

- Vancouver had the highest proportion of drivers observed using a cell phone while driving: 72 of 94 drivers (76.6%)
Results – Neighbourhood Income

Table 5: Number of drivers with at least one distraction by Neighbourhood Income (2009 and 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Barrie</th>
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<td>n</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highest</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>30.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>38.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lowest</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>31.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

• Effect of Neighbourhood Income:
  • Overall: mid > low > high
  • Varied by city:
    • Barrie: high > mid > low
    • Halifax: mid > low > high
    • Vancouver: low > mid > high
Limitations

- Poor visibility into the interior of the cars may have resulted in misclassification
- Observations captured students’ behaviour at one moment in time
  - they may engage in more or less risky behaviour at other times of the day
- School’s neighbourhood income a proxy for income
- Results may not be generalizable to young drivers who do not attend school
Conclusions

- Compliance with provincial GDL restrictions is relatively high:
  - Seat belt wearing rates in Barrie and Vancouver were 97% and 98%, respectively. However, Halifax rates were lower at 90%
  - Number of passengers were within restrictions and the fewer number in Vancouver may be explained by the stricter restriction in BC

- The presence of at least one distraction is approximately 1 in 6 drivers observed (16.4%)
  - Lower than self-report US youth data (Hedlund J, 2005) where 62% reported cell phone use and 33% failed to wear seatbelt

- Variations in provincial GDL requirements may have an impact on the kinds of distractions observed in each city
  - e.g. cell phone use was highest in Vancouver where legislation restricting their use did not come into force until 2010
Conclusions

- Distractions were seen more frequently in male drivers and drivers living in Vancouver.

- The effect of socioeconomic status varied between the cities, and this data needs to be further corroborated by other studies.

- Further data is needed:
  - to assess young drivers risk behaviour at other times, particularly during night driving.
  - To assess the these observations in relation to outcome data – motor vehicle crashes and related injury and deaths.
Acknowledgements: