

TITLE: The Role of Youth in Traffic Accidents: A Review of Past and Current California Data

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PROTECT OBJECTIVE:

To clarify the role of youth in traffic accident causation.

SUMMARY:

This paper notes that, based on past studies, it is clear that young drivers are overinvolved in traffic accidents, traffic violations and alcohol-related crashes. Part of the overinvolvement in crashes can be attributed to the greater incidence of traffic violations and high-risk driving behavior exhibited by young persons, particularly males. The evidence indicates that formal behind-the-wheel driver training has little or no impact on crash rates.

It is also stated that although empirical studies have yielded conflicting results, risk-taking has been advanced by numerous authorities as an explanatory construct for the high accident rate of young drivers.

The paper points out that risk perception and risk choice implicitly involve an attitude or sense of personal vulnerability and, in fact, recognition of vulnerability may be the single most important mechanism underlying risk taking. By invoking "personal vulnerability" as a maturational characteristic which increases with age, one might explain why risky driving decreases substantially at age 25-30. Unless one has a sufficient sense, cognitively and effectively, of being vulnerable to catastrophic events, there is little motivation to drive cautiously and defensively. If this conjecture has any validity, it leads to the pessimistic conclusion that not much can be done to short-circuit the process. In other words, the paper concludes, it may not be possible for any feasible countermeasure to make most 18-year-olds respond to the driving task like most 30-year-olds, other than the passage of 12 years. This theory could explain why driver training has proven ineffective in reducing the accident rates of young drivers.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Not applicable.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

This paper was not published as a DMV report. It was published in *Alcohol, Drugs, and Driving*, 1 (1-2), 45-61, June 1985.