

JUST SIX  
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH  
SUMMARY



# Prevalence of Texting while Driving and Other Risky Driving Behaviors among Young People in Ontario, Canada: Evidence from 2012 and 2014

## Key Details

### KEY WORDS

Prevalence, risk-taking, teenagers, driving, texting, behavior

### POPULATION GROUP

All youth

### STEPPING UP THEMES

Health and Wellness; Diversity, Social Inclusion and Safety

### RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario, Canada

### SOURCE

Academic

**“Over one-third of students in Grade 10-12 had texted while driving at least once in the past year.”**

### 1. What is the research about?

This research study examined accident occurrence and prevalence of three driving related risk behaviors– texting while driving, talking on the phone while driving, and speeding. The aim of the research was to evaluate risky driving behaviors by age and gender among Ontario youth, and to provide further insights on how to promote driving safety among youth.

### 2. Where did the research take place?

The study took place in Ontario, Canada. The benefit of this research location was that it provided information that localized the issue of risky driving behaviors among youth in Ontario, Canada. Most of what is currently known on the topic is heavily based in the United States.

### 3. Who is this research about?

The study was about youth aged 16-19 from Ontario, Canada. The final sample size consisted of 6,133 students who were mostly high school students and had an average age of 17.44 years. The final sample was 34.5% female and 65.5% male.

### 4. How was the research done?

This quantitative research study was done online and was carried out in two phases, Study 1 and Study 2. Data for Study 1 was collected between October 2012 and July 2013. Data for Study 2 was collected between September 2014 and February 2015.

Students answered questions from an online safety test called *Passport to Safety*, an educational tool used to create awareness among young people on occupational safety.

### 5. What are the key findings?

- In both Study 1 and Study 2, male youth were found to text more frequently while driving and speeding than females.
- There were statistically significant differences in age and texting while driving. 16 year olds reporting more frequent texting than 17, 18, and 19 year olds.
- Youth were more likely to be passengers in a vehicle with a driver who engaged in texting or talking while driving than actually driving and participating in the behavior themselves.

- Texting while driving and talking on the phone while driving were found to be strongly associated with speeding.
- Risky driving behaviors decreased between Study 1 and Study 2 with youth citing awareness on the dangers of texting while driving, laws and fines against texting and driving, and observing close call and accidents experienced by other people as factors that have helped reduce their risky driving behaviors.

## 6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

There is a wide range of socioeconomic impacts as a result of young driver fatalities and very few Canadian studies have examined the role of risk driving behaviors among teens. Young drivers are significantly overrepresented in driving related crashes and over one third of students in Grades 10-12 had texted while driving at least once in the last year. Additionally, Ontario is known to have one of the highest fines for distracted driving in Canada, with fines increasing from \$60 to \$280. Adolescents are more likely than adult drivers to engage in speeding and risky driving behavior.

This research study was able to provide helpful information on how to address risky driving behaviors among Ontario youth and can further assist policy makers and frontline youth workers with finding more effective means for encouraging youth to be more safe while driving. The researchers from the study provide the following recommendations:

- Create more targeted social media campaigns and messages on safe driving for young people, with a stronger emphasis on young males (a priority demographic for risky driving behaviors).
- Target youth passengers in vehicles through social marketing campaigns to address the bystander effect that occurs through watching people text or talk while driving.
- Carry out further research on prevention measures (fines, life stories, accidents) to better determine which mechanisms are more effective for reducing unsafe driving behaviors.



Tucker, S., Pek, S., Morrish, J., & Ruf, M. (2015). Prevalence of texting while driving and other risky driving behaviors among young people in Ontario, Canada: Evidence from 2012 and 2014. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 84, 144-152.