**Road crashes among underage adolescent drivers’ versus young drivers of legal driving age: A Cross-Sectional Study from an Urban Setting in Low-Middle Income Country, Karachi, Pakistan**

Adolescents have the highest burden of road traffic deaths.[1] Underage adolescents’ drivers are involved in fatal crashes three times more often compared with adults.[2] There is a six times higher crashes per million miles driven for adolescents compared to adult drivers.[3] Adolescents are vulnerable to road traffic crashes due to limited experience and risky taking behaviours.

In most countries the minimum driving age is 18 years but many adolescents start to drive earlier than the legal age if they have access to vehicle in the household. Underage driving is linked to adolescents’ aspiration of becoming independent and experience adventure augmented with peer pressure.[4]

Demographics, socioeconomic factors, behaviours and consequences related to road crashes by adolescent drivers were studied in high- income countries (HICs) where atleast one vehicle is available for every two persons. [5,6] The common crash risks in HICs among adolescent drivers are speeding, violation of safety rules, drink driving and use of cell phones. [6-8] Graduate driving license program in some high income countries aims to restrict the road traffic exposure of adolescent drivers; hence it is successful in reducing fatal crashes in young drivers.[9]

It is unclear how underage drivers are contributing in crash burden in low-income settings which have lower number of vehicles per population. Understanding of underage driving can be critical in suggesting preventive measures in low-income settings, as these countries account for about 90% of road deaths in adolescents globally. Unlike high-income countries, the low-income settings do not have stringent rules for obtaining driving license. Previous studies report high crash rates in early licensure period regardless of age of licensure compared to adults. [10-16]The risk of crashes is particularly high in first 12 to 18 months of independent driving after obtaining license which eventually decline. [17]

Our aim is to determine and compare the burden and characteristics of underage adolescent drivers’ age 15 to 17 years, 18-19 years, young drivers 20-24 years and adults 25-35 years involved in road crashes in Karachi, Pakistan.

**Methods**

Design

The study is cross-sectional design during the period 2007-2014.

Setting

The study setting is Karachi, a large urban area of Pakistan (about 3,530 square kilometers), with an estimated population of 18 million and a total length of the road network of over 8,000 kilometers.

Injury data were extracted from an ongoing road traffic injury surveillance project based on emergency department (ED) from all of the three government trauma centers in the city, and the two private tertiary care hospitals. The detailed methods have been described previously.[18]

These hospitals receive nearly all major trauma cases from the city. The data collectors of the surveillance project gather demographic information on the injured patients and details of the crash by asking victims, their relatives, ambulance drivers or any eyewitnesses. The system was piloted in late 2006 and formally launched in 2007.

Participants

Road traffic crash victims of age 15-24 years who are drivers of motorcycles or any other vehicle reporting to emergency departments of participating hospitals with injuries.

Outcome

Injury severity score and deaths

Exposure

Age groups 13-18 years and 19-24 years

Study variables

Gender, vehicle of driver injured, time and location of the crash, days of the week, type of vehicle involved in crash, helmet use and type of location (intersection or midblock).

Ethics approval

Ethics of study methods were approved from the Institutional Review Board of the Jinnah Post Graduate Medical Center, which is coordinating site of this road surveillance project.

Data analysis

We performed the analysis using R.[19] The categorical variables are described using frequencies and percentages (age, gender, injury patterns, vehicle type etc). Chi-square tests were used to assess crash characteristics associated with drivers of motorcycles versus other drivers. Logistic regression models to assess whether drivers of age 15-18 years or 19-24 years are likely to suffer severe injury (AIS ≥ 3) to a specific body region.

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