

Driving curfews may curb teen crime

March 28 2016



Dr. Monica Deza, assistant professor of economics in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences. Credit: UT Dallas

A new UT Dallas study found that teen driving curfews might do more than reduce car accidents. They also may prevent teens from committing crimes.

Arrests among teens ages 16-17 fell by as much as 6 percent in states with laws that restrict nighttime driving hours for teens, according to the study.

The research by Dr. Monica Deza, assistant professor of economics in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences, and co-author Daniel Litwok of the firm Abt Associates, was published online by the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*.

Most states' graduated driver licensing programs have nighttime restrictions. The programs typically include supervised learning and intermediate stages before young drivers receive full-privileged licenses. They have proven successful at reducing [risky behaviors](#) that cause accidents. The new study is one of the first to examine the programs' potential impact on crime.

"Being able to drive or having friends who can drive is the difference between going out and staying home on a Saturday night," Deza said. "It seemed intuitive to us that having a curfew on driving hours affected the probability that teenagers would get themselves into trouble."

Deza and Litwok, senior analyst and economist at Abt Associates in

Maryland, analyzed the FBI's Uniform Crime Report arrest data from 1995 to 2011. They compared arrests of 16- and 17-year-olds to arrests of young adults ages 18 and older in states with the nighttime driving curfew for new drivers.

Overall, arrests of the younger teens decreased by 4 to 6 percent. The reduction was even higher in the states with the strictest laws. In those states, arrests of 16- and 17-year-olds declined 5 to 8 percent.

The biggest crime reductions occurred in states that had graduated license programs in place the longest. The types of crimes most affected were manslaughter, murder and larceny. Arrests of 16- and 17-year-olds dropped 11 percent for manslaughter or murder, 5 percent for larceny, and 4 percent for aggravated assault.

Driving restrictions keep teens off the roads, lessen the influence of peers and change teen behavior, which may have contributed to the reduction in arrests, Deza said.

The researchers found that the laws were most effective when gasoline prices were at their lowest, when teens were likely to drive the most. The restrictions prevented those teen drivers from taking full advantage of the affordable gas prices, according to researchers.

"As policymakers become concerned with how low gasoline prices affect risky behaviors among [teens](#), they may want to take into account the role of graduated driving licensing in keeping teenagers off the streets, even in periods in which the cost of driving is particularly low," Deza said.

Deza said that analyses of the costs and benefits of graduated [driving](#) license programs should include the policy's impact on crime. She said that previous analyses may have underestimated graduated licensing

programs' benefit by not factoring in crime.

Deza and Litwok initially conducted separate studies. The authors combined their research after yielding identical results. Litwok received support from Abt Associates and an Institute of Education and Sciences Grant for his research.

More information: [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10 ...
2/pam.21893/abstract](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pam.21893/abstract)

Provided by University of Texas at Dallas

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