

Age matters behind the wheel—but not how you might expect

February 22 2018



Among new drivers, teenagers were judged to be better prepared for a state driving test than those in their 20s. Credit: UCLA Health

A UCLA researcher explored the relationship between new drivers' skills and four factors.

Instructors from a Los Angeles driving school rated students' driving skills on a scale of 1 to 4, and the researchers analyzed the results based on these variables:

- **Age:** Among males, the older the student, the worse his driving skills score. There was a similar trend among female drivers, but it was not as significant.
- **Gender:** Students were asked to rate their confidence in their own driving skills. Although female students on average were less confident than their male counterparts, men and women received almost the same average score from driving instructors.
- **Sports participation:** A history of playing any kind of organized sport was linked to better driving skills among both men and women. Men and women who played sports scored 2.66 and 2.43, respectively, while men and women who had not played organized sports had average scores of 1.94 and 1.60. Previous studies have shown that participating in organized sports improves spatial perception.
- **Video game experience:** Playing video games showed no relationship to driving abilities. The authors expected the opposite, because earlier research has shown that playing action video games improves spatial cognition.

One hundred novice drivers—each with less than five hours of driving experience before their first driving lesson—participated in a two-hour lesson focused on car control and traffic maneuvers. Students drove on the streets of Los Angeles, ranked by the 2017 INRIX Global Traffic Scorecard as having the worst traffic in the world. The group was evenly split by gender, and the students' average age was 18.

Following the lesson, the instructor ranked each student's skills on a four-point scale, in which 1 means the student requires far more instruction and practice before taking the state driving test and 4 indicates the

instructor believes the [student](#) is prepared to pass the test.

To obtain a driver's license in the U.S., every person under age 18 must pay for a formal driver's education class with a minimum of six hours of driving instruction on the road. In California, teens must also wait six months after earning a learner's permit before taking the state's department of motor vehicles driving test.

The authors propose that the DMV in California and other states consider ending mandatory driver's education for only teens and expanding safety training to new drivers of all ages. If translated into policy, the findings could improve driver training, ultimately reducing traffic accidents and saving lives.

For their next study, the researchers intend to analyze whether drivers' gender, age and socioeconomic status (which they would estimate based on the driver's ZIP code) relate to whether candidates pass or fail their driving tests.

More information: Nancy L. Wayne et al. Impact of gender, organized athletics, and video gaming on driving skills in novice drivers, *PLOS ONE* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0190885](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0190885)

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

Citation: Age matters behind the wheel—but not how you might expect (2018, February 22) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-02-age-wheelbut.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.