

The Correlation Between Adolescent-Reported Parental Driving Behaviors and Observed Adult Driving Behaviors.

Bryan G. Kane MD

Lehigh Valley Health Network, bryan.kane@lvhn.org

Gavin C. Barr MD

Lehigh Valley Health Network, Gavin.Barr_jr@lvhn.org

Shawna Murphy DO

Lehigh Valley Health Network, Shawna_M.Murphy@lvhn.org

Valerie Rupp RN, BSN

Lehigh Valley Health Network, Valerie.Rupp@lvhn.org

Kimberly Hamilton BA

Lehigh Valley Health, Kimberly.Hamilton@lvhn.org

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Bryan G. Kane MD; Gavin C. Barr MD; Shawna Murphy DO; Valerie Rupp RN, BSN; Kimberly Hamilton BA; Robert D. Barraco MD; Traci Anselmo DO; and James F. Reed III PhD

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Shawna Murphy, DO; Bryan Kane, MD; Gavin C. Barr, Jr., MD; Valerie Rupp, RN, BSN; Kimberly Hamilton, BA;
Robert Barraco, MD; Traci Anselmo, DO; James Reed, PhD
Lehigh Valley Health Network, Allentown, Pennsylvania

Background:

Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death in American teens. Several factors have been shown to contribute to high teenage driving fatality rates: lack of experience, seat belt non-compliance, and risky behavior. The behavior modeled by adults may influence adolescent driving. The aim of the study was to compare adolescent-reported parental driving behavior with the observed behaviors of adults in the same community.

Methods:

This was a prospective, observational study done within the 2007-2008 academic school year at four area schools in New Jersey (NJ) and Pennsylvania (PA). During the study period, a primary cell phone law was in place in NJ, but not in PA. Both states had primary seat belt laws during the study period. Students were anonymously surveyed about their parents' driving behaviors and concomitantly adults were anonymously observed while driving near school grounds at the beginning and at the end of the school day. The survey consisted of questions related to driving behaviors. A standardized observation tool was developed to record seat belt use and driving behaviors.

Results:

	All	Pennsylvania	New Jersey
Adult observed total cell phone use	7.5%	9.0%	2.5%
Adult observed total distractions	25.5%	26.9%	20.7%
Adult observed seat belt use (I)	77.6%	79.8%	70.2%
Teen reported adult seat belt use (II)	84.5%	83.7%	86.0%
p-value (I versus II)	0.001	0.005	0.001
Teens regard parents as safe drivers (III)	94.8%	93.9%	96.4%
p-value (I versus III)	0.001	0.001	0.001



Conclusions:

The study design prevents direct correlation between the student reported parental driving behavior and the observed adult driving behavior in school zones. Lack of seat belt use and driving while distracted are both unsafe driving behaviors. Based on the results of the survey and observations, teens significantly overestimate the safety of parental driving behaviors.