



National Center for Children in Poverty  
Mailman School of Public Health  
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### **For Immediate Release**

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## **RESEARCHERS: HALF OF AMERICA'S ADOLESCENTS TEXT WHILE DRIVING**

*Host of behaviors and developmental factors make this age group  
more vulnerable to violence and injury*

**New York City** – Half of America’s adolescents text while driving, which, research shows, makes them 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash. Texting while driving, in fact, can cause as much if not more impairment than alcohol consumption, according to researchers at National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP).

The growing and dangerous phenomenon of adolescent texting and driving is just one of a number of behaviors and developmental factors that put adolescents at higher risk for unintentional injury and violence, as explained in a new report for policymakers released this month by NCCP, which is part of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University.

“We looked at unintentional injury and violence among adolescents because they are two of the interrelated areas of vulnerability that many adolescents encounter,” says Susan Wile Schwarz, the NCCP research analyst who researched the data on adolescents and compiled the fact sheet. “Combined with problems related to mental health, sexual and reproductive health, substance use, and nutrition and obesity, unintentional injury and violence form part of a complex web of potential challenges to adolescents’ health.”

The research points to developmental and social factors, such as time spent without adult supervision and increasing independence, that help explain why adolescents are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors than either younger children or adults. But simple biology also plays a role. “The maturation of brain networks responsible for self-regulation often does not occur until late adolescence, making them more likely to engage in risky behaviors,” writes Schwarz in her report.

“We explored the incidence and causes of violence because it is such a pronounced phenomenon among adolescents,” says Schwarz. Overall, adolescents are victimized by violent crimes at a higher rate than any other age group (47/1,000 for age 12-15 and 52/1,000 for age 16-19, as compared to 25.4/1,000 for the general population) and this fact adds to the litany of factors that make them the most vulnerable age group.

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Data about adolescents and violence include:

- In 2006, more than 720,000 young people (age 10 to 24) were treated in emergency departments for injuries sustained from violence.
- Victims of dating violence are not only at increased risk for injury, they are also more likely to engage in sexual activity (2.6 times), binge drinking (1.3 times), suicide attempts (3.3 times), and physical fights (1.7 times).
- Among 10 to 19 year-olds, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans but not for their Hispanic or White counterparts.
- Forty-four percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender students reported being physically harassed.

“Policymakers need to be aware of the varying factors that make this particular age group more vulnerable when it comes to unintentional injury and violence,” says Schwarz, who ends the report with policy recommendations – many seemingly common sense ones – such as enforcing seat belt laws and passenger laws – as well as others, such as regulating the sale and resale of firearms. For the full fact sheet, including all of the organization’s recommendations, access: [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_890.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_890.html)

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*The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation’s leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America’s low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.*