

## Underlying factors in the take up of active travel among South Australian young adults

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### Abstract

Since at least 2000, declines in young adult driver licensing have been observed in several overseas countries and in some Australian jurisdictions. This study investigates driver licensing trends in South Australia since 2009 for those aged 17-24 years, in comparison to other age groups and equivalent Victorian data. Importantly, the trends are examined in relation to gender, location of residence and socio-economic status. The findings will have implications for future planning around safe active travel, shared vehicle use and public transport initiatives.

### Background

Several studies have reported declines in young adult driver licensing in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom and some European countries (e.g. Sivak & Schoettle, 2012; Delbosc & Currie, 2013; Chatterjee et al. 2018). Also, in the UK, young adult licence holders during a 'typical' week, now tend to have reduced self-driven trips and reduced overall distances driven, while increasingly choosing alternative travel modes (Chatterjee et al. 2018). Note also, some young adults have licences but choose not to drive, just as some drive but without a licence (Chatterjee et al. 2018).

Delbosc and Currie (2013), Delbosc (2017) and Chatterjee et al. (2018) all considered that declines in both licensing and private car use among young people are indicative of a wide range of factors such as: living with parents for longer, delays in partnering and parenting, difficulties in securing stable employment, costs of getting a licence and running a car, ubiquitous use of smart communication technologies, declining social status of owning a car, environmental concerns, and the attractiveness of alternative travel modes. Chatterjee et al. (2018) concluded that, not only is each factor in itself intrinsically complex, but collectively the factors are likely to be influential on licensing rates and car ownership in complex combinations rather than in distinct and separate ways.

In Australia, Raimond and Milthorpe (2010) have reported falling driver licensing rates among young adults in Sydney. More recently, Wundersitz, Bailey and Thompson (2017) found decreasing licensing rates since 2001 among those aged 18-24 and living in Victoria. Over a third of Victorians in this age group did *not* hold a driver's licence in 2016. Females and those living in urbanised environments tended to have lower licensing rates. A small scale national survey (Bailey, Wundersitz, Raftery & Baldock, 2015) of young adults who do not drive ( $n=144$ ) found that most said this was because they prefer active travel modes, they dislike driving, or they feel that public transport/being a passenger suits them better.

If fewer young adults are obtaining or delaying a driver's licence and more are taking up or supplementing their driving with active travel modes such as walking or cycling, more of them will be travelling as vulnerable road users. This provides a rationale for not only strengthening the programs and communication activities focusing on safe active travel but also for increased provision of infrastructure that supports safer walking and cycling. Similarly, if young adults, with or without a licence, show a preference for using public transport and/or sharing private vehicles, then making these travel modes more attractive may bring reduced on-road risk in terms of crashes if those young people themselves are then not driving vehicles.

The current study identified trends in South Australian driver licence data since 2009 with the aim of extending the current Australian knowledge base of trends in young adult travel behaviour. Additional understandings of the factors underlying the trends were gained through analyses of the data by age, gender and socio-economic status.

## Method

The total numbers of licence holders (full and provisional, but excluding learner's permits) at individual ages (17 to 90+ years) as at 30 June for each year 2009-2018, and broken down by gender and postcode of residence, were obtained from the South Australian Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure. The numbers of driver's licences held at each age and in each year were then tabulated against Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population data by postcode and by gender. The percentages of licensed drivers per population were then calculated for each age category and examined to ascertain trends over time in licensing rates, including those *not* holding a licence. These trends will be analysed by gender, residence location, and socio-economic status using ABS geographic rankings of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage.

## Results

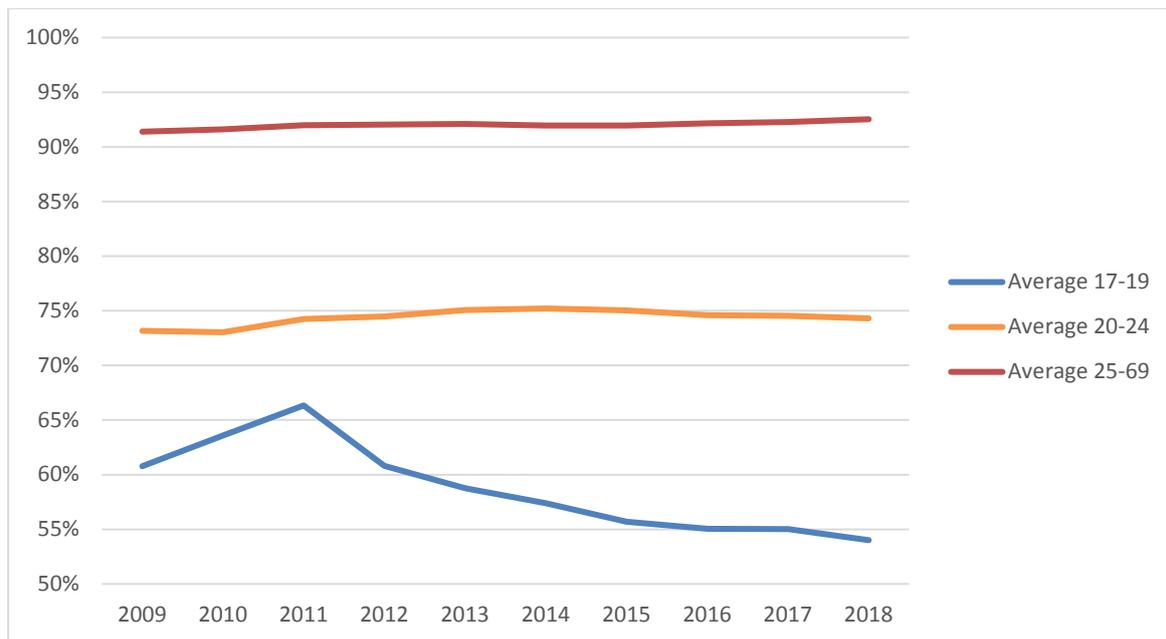
Preliminary analyses indicated that South Australians aged 17-19 and 20-24 during 2009 to 2018 were substantially *less* likely to be licensed to drive than those aged 25-69, as can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 1. Since 2009, over 91% of 25-69 year olds held a licence, but 17-19 year olds experienced lower licensing rates between 54% and 66%, and those aged 20-24 years rates between 73% and 75%.

As can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 1, the licensing rates for 17-19 year olds increased markedly from 2009 to 2011, most likely as the young adults concerned anticipated the introduction of the strengthened Graduated Licensing Scheme provisions introduced in South Australia during 2010, and sought to obtain a licence before the new provisions affected them. However, this increase was only temporary as the licensed driver rates for 17-19 year olds then substantially declined, with the 2018 licence rate of 54% for this group lower than the corresponding 61% rate for 2009. Importantly, approximately 45% of South Australians aged 17-19 did *not* hold a driver's licence between 2015 to 2018.

**Table 1. Driver licensing rates per population, South Australia, 2009-2018, by age group**

Age group	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Age 17-19 years	60.8%	63.6%	66.3%	60.8%	58.8%	57.4%	55.7%	55.1%	55.0%	54.0%
Age 20-24 years	73.2%	73.0%	74.2%	74.5%	75.1%	75.2%	75.0%	74.6%	74.5%	74.3%
Age 25-69 years	91.4%	91.6%	92.0%	92.0%	92.1%	92.0%	91.9%	92.1%	92.3%	92.5%

**Figure 1. Driver licensing rates per population, South Australia, 2009-2018, by age group**



## Conclusion

Compared to drivers aged 25 and over, the lower licensing rates among 17-24 year olds, but particularly among 17-19 year olds, suggest that South Australians in this age group are increasingly choosing alternative travel modes, bringing implications for improved support for safer active travel and encouraging the take up of shared and public forms of transport.

## References

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