

## Age and Gender May Be Factors in the Severity of Car Accidents

A new study conducted at Purdue University demonstrates there are statistical differences in traffic-accident injuries depending on the gender and age of drivers. The Purdue researchers found significant differences in the severity of injuries suffered in accidents involving men and women drivers and drivers within three age groups: young drivers, 16-24; middle-aged drivers, 25-64; and older drivers, 65 and above. The researchers' findings corroborated national statistics, which indicated that fatalities rose by 7 percent for drivers 75 and older from 1981 to 2000, remained steady for drivers from 65-74, but dropped for younger drivers.

The study also included the following findings:

- Accidents involving an overturned vehicle increased the likelihood of a fatality by 220 percent for older men, but only 154 percent for young men. Rollover accidents increased the likelihood of fatality by 523 percent for older women, but only 116 percent for young women.
- Vehicles carrying one or more passengers increased the likelihood of driver fatality by 114 percent for young men and 70 percent for middle-aged men, but had no significant effect on the injury levels of older male drivers.
- Vehicles less than five years old increased the likelihood of fatality for older men by 216 percent and for young men by 71 percent, but did not have a significant effect on the likelihood of a fatality for middle-aged men.
- Not using safety belts increased the likelihood of injury by 119 percent for young women, 164 percent for middle-aged women and 187 percent for older women.
- Accidents occurring in rural areas increased the likelihood of fatalities by 208 percent for young women but had no significant effect on the injury levels of other female age categories.
- Vehicles six years old and older increased the likelihood of injury for middle-aged female drivers by more than 200 percent but had no significant impact on the injury levels of other female age categories.
- Fatalities were more likely for middle-aged men who fell asleep at the wheel, exceeded the speed limit, got into an accident at an intersection or had an accident after midnight on Friday or Saturday, while the same factors had no significant effect on the injury levels of middle-aged female drivers.
- Injuries were shown to be more likely for middle-aged women who drive during daytime hours, drive while under the influence of alcohol or drive while ill, while the same factors did not significantly influence the injury levels of middle-aged male drivers.
- Driving on curvy roads and driving vehicles six years old and older increased the likelihood of injury for middle-aged female drivers but were found to have no significant effect on the injury levels of middle-aged male drivers.

The researchers went on to note that in many cases, alcohol consumption might have had an indirect effect on the outcomes because it increased the probability of not wearing a safety belt and speeding. However, once you take this into account, the effect of alcohol on injury severity isn't significant because the level of injury is a function of the type of accident not of sobriety. Whether or not the accident occurred because the driver was drunk was beyond the scope of the study. The researchers developed their statistical models based on the accident having occurred regardless of the reason.