

Youths with mood disorders 30% less likely to acquire driver's license than peers, researchers find

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Researchers from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) found that teens and young adults with mood disorders, such as depression and

bipolar disorder, were 30% less likely to obtain their driver's license than peers without such disorders. Additionally, those youths with mood disorders experienced a slightly elevated risk of crashing. These findings suggest that these teens and young adults could benefit from guidance on obtaining licensure and accessing training to avoid crashes when they are newly licensed.

The findings were published online in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

Mood disorders can broadly impact physical and emotional well-being, and as many as one in 10 teens and [young adults](#) have been diagnosed with one. Importantly, these disorders often develop at the age when individuals are eligible to get a driver's license. Skills that are required for safe driving, such as attention, memory and [motor skills](#), are often impaired in those diagnosed with [mood disorders](#).

The Center for Injury Research and Prevention (CIRP) at CHOP has been conducting research for the past several years on adolescents and young adults with neurodevelopmental differences and mental health conditions and the challenges they face prior to and following licensure.

This research has examined their rates of licensure and risk of crashing to help establish the epidemiologic foundation for future translational research. With this scientific foundation for driving safety for different populations, researchers can gain a better understanding of the factors that will help inform evidence-based guidance for families regarding driving readiness and driving instruction.

This study sought to address the gap in the literature on driving and mood disorders in youths since most prior driving studies focused on adults, and [young drivers](#) are different from adults given their developmentally related crash risks. This is the first study to utilize a longitudinal cohort with objective outcome measures to report on

licensure and driving outcomes for youths with mood disorders.

"Our study is the first to identify adolescents and young adults with mood disorders within a large sample to evaluate objective measures of licensing and driving outcomes when newly licensed," says Christopher E. Gaw, MD, MPH, MBE, lead author of the study and a pediatric emergency medicine physician in the Division of Emergency Medicine at Nationwide Children's Hospital, who conducted this research while at CHOP.

"Obtaining a driver's license is an exciting milestone for many teens and young adults, but our study found that youths with mood disorders are 30% less likely to acquire a driver's license than their peers without mood disorders. We need to find ways to help them stay mobile so that they can lead healthy, full lives."

The [retrospective cohort study](#) used the [New Jersey Safety and Health Outcomes \(NJ-SHO\) Data Warehouse](#) to examine both licensure and driving outcomes among adolescents and young adults with mood disorders.

Researchers identified a cohort of 89,074 patients in CHOP's health care network who were born from 1987 through 2000 and linked their electronic health data with New Jersey driver licensing and crash data. They followed 1,879 youths with mood disorders and 84,294 youths without a mood disorder who were age-eligible for licensure to determine the associations between mood disorders and driver's licensure and other driving outcomes.

In addition to being less likely to acquire a license compared with their peers without mood disorders, young drivers with mood disorders in the study population had slightly higher overall crash rates at both 12- and 48-months (16% and 19% higher, respectively) after obtaining their

license.

Additionally, young drivers with mood disorders were more likely to experience increased rates of at-fault crashes, night crashes, alcohol-related crashes and moving violation citations. Young drivers with mood disorders had nearly double the rate of license suspensions compared to peers without mood disorders.

"Our results indicate that newly licensed youths with mood disorders have a greater risk of crashing than other young drivers but that this is a manageable risk," says senior study author Allison E. Curry, Ph.D., MPH, associate professor of Pediatrics at CIRP at CHOP and principal investigator for the NJ-SHO Center for Integrated Data.

"Our findings point to the need to develop evidence-based training and education for adolescents and young adults with mood disorders who want to drive."

More information: Gaw et al, Driver's Licensure and Driving Outcomes Among Youths with Mood Disorders, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.5543](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.5543)

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