



UNLICENSED DRIVERS

INVOLVED IN FATAL ROAD CRASHES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

OVERVIEW Unlicensed drivers and riders can represent a high risk element within the driving community as they may have never undergone a practical driving test or they may be driving while disqualified due to a breach of licence condition or having committed a road traffic offence. The number of people expiated or apprehended by SA Police for driving unlicensed has trended up slightly over the last five years as has the number of unlicensed drivers involved in fatal crashes. There were on average ten fatal crashes a year involving an unlicensed driver/rider over the last five years. Unlicensed drivers involved in fatal crashes are more likely to be male and aged between 20–39 years of age. These drivers are also more likely to test positive for illegal drugs or blood alcohol concentration and less likely to be wearing a seatbelt or helmet than licensed drivers involved in fatal crashes.

For the purposes of this fact sheet, “unlicensed” refers to situations where:

- The driver/rider has never held a licence
- The licence has expired and the driver/rider has failed to renew
- The driver/rider is unlicensed for the particular vehicle they were driving at the time of a crash (eg. car licence while driving a heavy vehicle, or riding a motorcycle without the appropriate licence endorsement)
- Learner driver unaccompanied by a Qualified Supervising Driver*
- The driver/rider has been disqualified from driving.

*(*To act as a Qualified Supervising Driver for a learner’s permit holder, the accompanying driver must have held a full driver’s licence continuously for the previous two years)*

Driving Unlicensed

It is difficult to estimate the number of drivers or riders who drive while unlicensed at any one time. However Table 1 shows the number of drivers reported for driving while unlicensed or disqualified, and the number of drivers who have been reported or received an expiation notice for driving with an expired or inappropriate licence over the past 5 years.

Table 1: Drivers and riders expiated or apprehended for driving unlicensed, South Australia, 2015-2019

Year	Expiated/Reported for Driving with Expired or Inappropriate Licence	Reported for Driving Unlicensed/Driving Disqualified
2015	10620	6445
2016	10884	6181
2017	11152	6007
2018	10371	5895
2019	8755	4276
5 yr Avg	10291	5761

Table 2 shows that between 2015 and 2019, 54 fatal crashes involved an unlicensed driver, an average of 11 fatal crashes per year. This equates to 12% of all fatal crashes. Of the unlicensed drivers or riders, the unlicensed person was considered responsible for the crash in 75% of these 54 fatal crashes.

Table 2: Fatal crashes involving unlicensed drivers, South Australia, 2015-2019

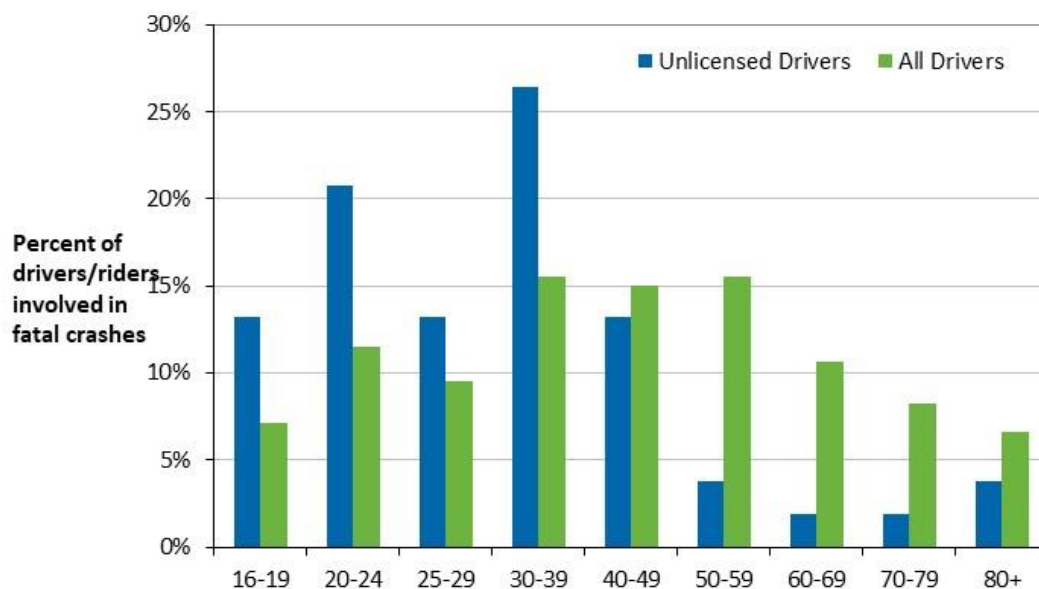
Year	Number of crashes	Percent of all fatal crashes
2015	5	7%
2016	10	13%
2017	19	20%
2018	8	11%
2019	12	11%
Total	54	12%

The 54 crashes in Table 2 involved 55 unlicensed drivers (one crash involved two unlicensed drivers) of these:

- 30% were disqualified from driving at the time of the crash
- 18% had never held a licence
- 25% were unlicensed for the vehicle which they were operating at the time of the crash
- 11% had their licence cancelled
- 12% allowed their licence to expire
- 5% had surrendered their licence.

The 54 fatal crashes involving unlicensed drivers over the past 5 years resulted in 55 fatalities, 27 serious injuries and 24 minor injuries. The most prevalent fatal crash types involving unlicensed drivers were hit fixed object (38%), roll overs (17%), head on each represented 17% of crashes and right angle crashes represented 9% of crashes.

Figure 1: Drivers and riders involved in fatal crashes by age group and licence, South Australia, 2015-2019



Age and Gender

Figure 1 shows that the age group distribution of unlicensed drivers and riders involved in fatal crashes is different to drivers and riders involved in fatal crashes generally. The majority (60%) of unlicensed drivers and riders involved in fatal crashes were aged between 25-39 years of age, compared to 37% of drivers involved in fatal crashes generally. By contrast 11% of unlicensed drivers involved in fatal crashes were aged 50 years or older, whereas drivers and riders aged 50+ accounted for 41% of fatal crashes more generally. Males are over-represented, with 92% of unlicensed drivers involved in fatal crashes being male.

Rural or Metropolitan ¹

For the 5 year period 2015 to 2019, 48% of fatal crashes involving unlicensed drivers occurred in rural areas. This is lower than all fatal crashes in general where 55% occur in rural areas.

Other Risk Factors

Driving while unlicensed is already a risk taking activity. When combined with other risk factors such as driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs and failure to wear a seatbelt or helmet, the likelihood of a crash occurring and ending in a fatality increases.

¹ Rural and metropolitan boundaries changed on 1 January 2013 to align with new ABS Greater Adelaide City Statistical Area boundaries, new boundaries have been used in calculations and will not be comparable with previous editions of this report.

Seatbelts & Helmets

Table 3 shows the proportion of driver and rider fatalities who did not wear a seatbelt or helmet over the past 5 years and there were more unlicensed drivers and riders who failed to wear this safety equipment.

Table 3: Drivers and riders fatalities by seatbelt/helmet not worn, South Australia, 2015-2019

	Seatbelt not worn		Helmet not worn
Unlicensed Drivers	39%	Unlicensed Riders	17%
All Drivers	25%	All Riders	4%

Alcohol & Drugs

Of the unlicensed drivers and riders who died as a result of the crash and were tested, 32% were found to be over the legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit of 0.05. Of those who had a positive BAC, 63% were three or more times over the legal limit. In addition, 51% were found to have MDMA (ecstasy), methamphetamine, THC (Cannabis) or a combination of these drugs in their system.

This compares to all driver/rider fatalities, where of those tested, 23% had a BAC over the legal limit, and 19% tested positive for one or a combination of drugs.

Definitions of police reported casualty types:

Casualty Crash – crash where at least one fatality, serious injury or minor injury occurs.

Casualty – A fatality, serious injury or minor injury.

Fatal Crash – A crash for which there is at least one fatality.

Fatality – A person who dies within 30 days of a crash as a result of injuries sustained in that crash.

Serious Injury Crash – A non-fatal crash in which at least one person is seriously injured.

Serious Injury – A person who sustains injuries and is admitted to hospital for a minimum period of an overnight stay as a result of a road crash and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

Minor Injury Crash – A crash in which at least one person sustains injury but no person is seriously injured or dies within 30 days of the crash.

Minor Injury – A person who sustains injuries requiring medical treatment, either by a doctor or in a hospital, as a result of a road crash and who was not admitted to hospital and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

Data sources

The data presented in this report was obtained from the Department for Infrastructure and Transport Road Crash Database. The information was compiled from police reported road casualty crashes only.

Enquiries

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