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Removing Transportation Barriers to Employment: The Impact of Driver's License Suspension Policies on Milwaukee County Teens

by John Pawasarat, Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, February 2000.

This report examines the impact of current driver's license suspension and revocation policies on teenagers in Milwaukee County and central city Milwaukee neighborhoods. It is part of a series of public policy studies on barriers to employment for Milwaukee area workers. The research focuses on the special problems of youth in securing and keeping valid driver's licenses due to municipal and circuit court fine and forfeiture collection policies.

Central city Milwaukee teenagers enter the labor market with several disadvantages. They reside in neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of job seekers compared with available job openings, and they lack the work experience of other job seekers. Additionally, many of the job openings available to entry-level workers are located in Waukesha, Ozaukee and Washington Counties and portions of Milwaukee County beyond the bus lines or not easily accessed by public transportation. Teenagers and young adults with a driver's license and access to a car can tap into jobs outside their neighborhoods and seek out employment in industries with greater opportunities for advancement.

Prior state legislation allowed municipal and circuit courts to place driver's license suspensions on juveniles who failed to pay fines for curfew violations, underage drinking, jaywalking, and other violations. In most cases, suspensions were placed on juveniles who had not yet obtained a driver's license. This study uses Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) driver's license and suspension and revocation files to determine what happened to suspended teens as they reached working age and to describe differences in policy impact by neighborhood.

Driver's License Status of Central City Teenagers (Ages 16-18) as of January 1999

Analysis of the driver's license status of all Milwaukee County teenagers ages 16-18 in the Wisconsin Department of Transportation files in January 1999 showed that:

- A total of 9,046 Milwaukee County youth had suspensions recorded against them. Most suspensions (89 percent) were issued to city residents and 64 percent were issued to teens from central city neighborhoods.
- State policies permit local governmental units to place a hold on DOT driver's license applications for non-payment of juvenile and civil forfeitures unrelated to the operation of a vehicle. Most suspended teens (87 percent) had suspensions solely for non-payment of fines.
- Nearly all suspensions (93 percent) were given to teens without a driver's license.
- Multiple suspensions are common, and before a license can be obtained the youth must pay all fines plus a \$50.00 reinstatement fee. By January 1999, 21,743 suspension orders were issued for Milwaukee County 16, 17 and 18 year olds, and 97 percent were for failure to pay fines and civil forfeitures (of which 17,649 were for juvenile fines).
- City of Milwaukee teens were much more likely to be suspended than to have a valid driver's license to such an extent that now more teens have a suspension than a valid driver's license.
- Many youth drive while suspended. Most (71 percent) Milwaukee County teens with driver's license revocations (1,304 out of the 1,828 total) received the revocation for driving while suspended.

- In central city Milwaukee zipcodes, for every male teen with a valid license there are three males with a suspension or revocation; for every female teen with a valid license there are two females with a suspension or revocation.
- Suburban teens were much less likely to be suspended with seven teens having a license for every one with a suspension.

Driver's License Status of Milwaukee County Teens by Age and Location as of January 1999

	Teens in Central City*			Non-Central City			Milwaukee County		
	Milwaukee:			Teens in Milwaukee:			Suburban Teens:		
	<u>16 Yr</u>	<u>17 Yr</u>	<u>18 Yr</u>	<u>16 Yr</u>	<u>17 Yr</u>	<u>18 Yr</u>	<u>16 Yr</u>	<u>17 Yr</u>	<u>18 Yr</u>
Females									
With driver's license and no suspension/revocation	56	344	542	139	591	855	365	1,231	1,396
With suspension/revocation	610	750	845	229	273	338	47	93	125
Males									
With driver's license and no suspension/revocation	63	364	479	136	600	789	311	1,225	1,371
With suspension/revocation	873	1,131	1,418	331	477	587	90	177	255

*Includes Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) neighborhoods of zipcodes 53204, 53205, 53206, 53208, 53210, 53212, 53216, 53218 and 53233.

What Happens to Teenagers Suspended for Not Paying Juvenile Fines?

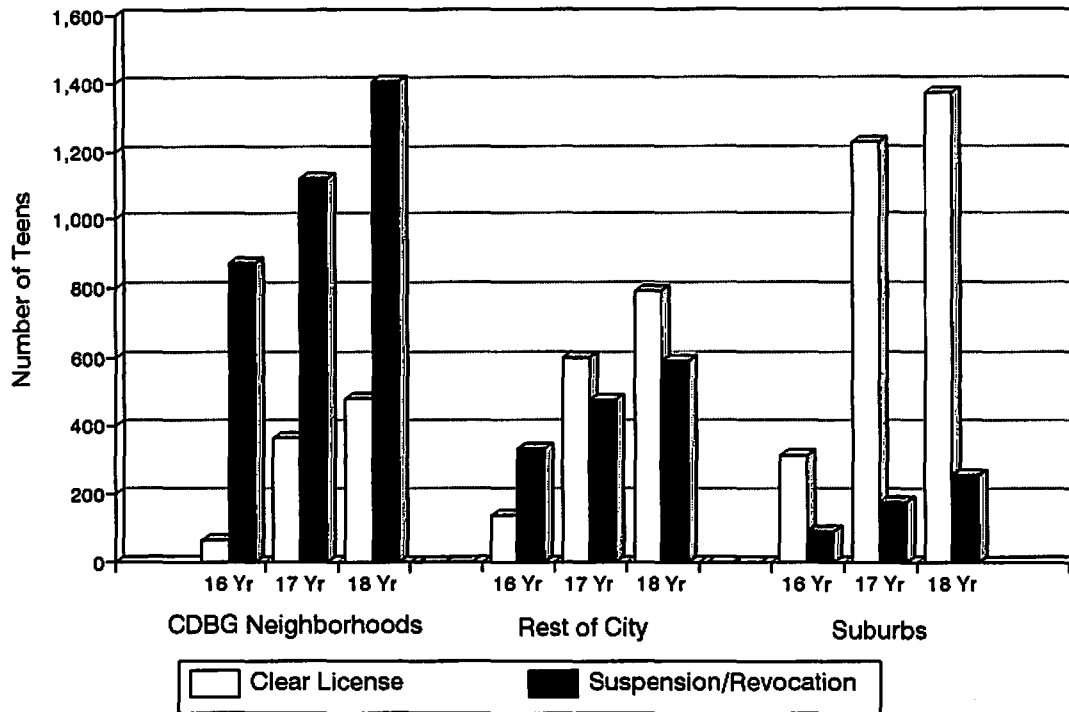
To determine what happens to teenagers suspended for not paying juvenile fines, an analysis was conducted of the 4,708 Milwaukee County teens who were 16 and 17 years old and showed driver's license suspensions for non-payment of juvenile fines in the January 1997 DOT file.

- Few of these 16 and 17 year old teens were licensed drivers. Only 102 (or 2 percent) of these teens had a driver's license as of January 1997, and only 1 percent had an instructional permit.
- Most of the 16 and 17 year old teenagers receiving juvenile suspensions (3,075, or 65 percent) lived in central city neighborhoods.
- Most of the 16 and 17 year old teenagers with juvenile suspensions were males (62 percent).

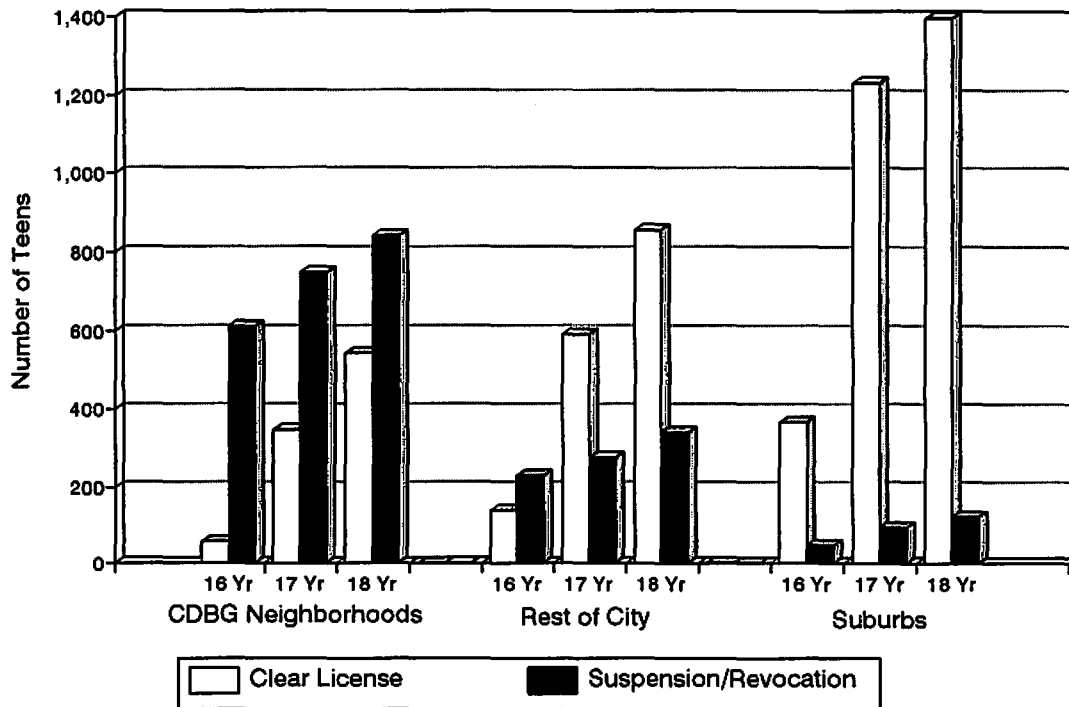
The January 1999 DOT files were used to determine what had happened to the 4,708 teens (given suspensions for non-payment of juvenile fines) two years later when they were 18 and 19 years old.

- Only 392 (or 8 percent) of the teens (now 18 and 19 years old) had a driver's license, and only 2 percent had an instructional permit.
- Most of the suspended teens (3,770, or 80 percent) had suspensions solely for non-payment of fines (either as juveniles or adults) and had no traffic-related suspensions or revocations.
- Many of the teens with suspensions for non-payment of juvenile fines drove anyway. As a result, some 17 percent incurred additional suspensions or revocations issued against their record. By January 1999, or two years later, 514 teens had a subsequent traffic-related suspension (including points for driving without a license), and of these 192 also had a revocation order. Another 308 teens had no traffic-related suspensions but were given revocation orders (66 percent of which were for "operating while suspended").

Driver's License Status of Male Teens in Milwaukee County by Age



Driver's License Status of Female Teens in Milwaukee County by Age



- Suspended teens who live in central city Milwaukee neighborhoods were much less likely to have gotten a driver's license two years later. Only 4 percent of the 3,075 suspended teens from central city neighborhoods had gotten a driver's license by January 1999, compared with 16 percent of the 1,633 suspended teens from other areas who obtained a driver's license by January 1999.

Driver's License Status of Central City Milwaukee Teens

The driver's license status of teenagers in central city neighborhoods was examined by zipcode to assess driver's license status for male and female teens ages 16-18, as of January 1999.

- In some zipcodes (53205, 53206 and 53233) the ratio of driver's licenses to suspensions/revocations was one to nine for male teens.
- For female teens in the central city, the ratio of those with a driver's license to those suspended was about one to five in zipcodes 53204, 53205, 53206 and 53212.

Driver's License Status of Central City Teens Ages 16-18 Years as of January 1999

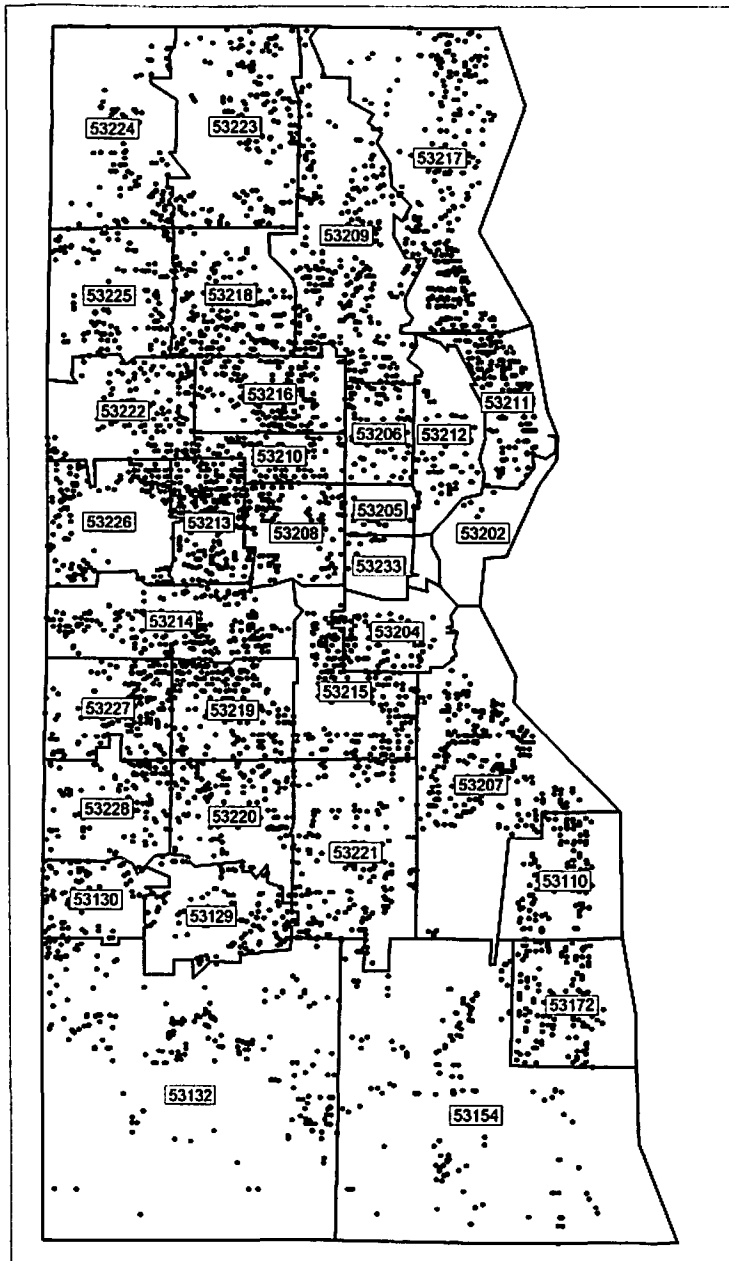
<u>Males by Zipcode</u>	<u>Teens in DOT File*</u>	<u>Teens with Suspensions/ Revocations</u>	<u>Teens with Valid License and No Suspension/Revocation Number</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
53204	638	528	110	17%
53205	257	230	27	11%
53206	689	613	76	11%
53208	633	502	131	21%
53210	517	411	106	21%
53212	531	459	72	14%
53216	423	262	161	38%
53218	564	349	215	38%
53233	<u>75</u>	<u>68</u>	<u>7</u>	9%
TOTAL MALES	4,327	3,422	905	21%
<u>Females by Zipcode</u>				
53204	378	300	78	21%
53205	130	106	24	18%
53206	493	410	83	17%
53208	485	355	130	27%
53210	415	281	134	32%
53212	363	298	65	20%
53216	384	192	192	50%
53218	434	214	220	51%
53233	<u>65</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>16</u>	25%
TOTAL FEMALES	3,147	2,205	942	30%

* Does not include teens with instructional permits.

Funding support for this study was provided in part by the Helen Bader Foundation. For further information, contact the Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 161 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 6000, Milwaukee, WI 53203. Phone (414) 227-3385. Other driver's license studies are available on the Internet at www.uwm.edu/Dept/ETI.

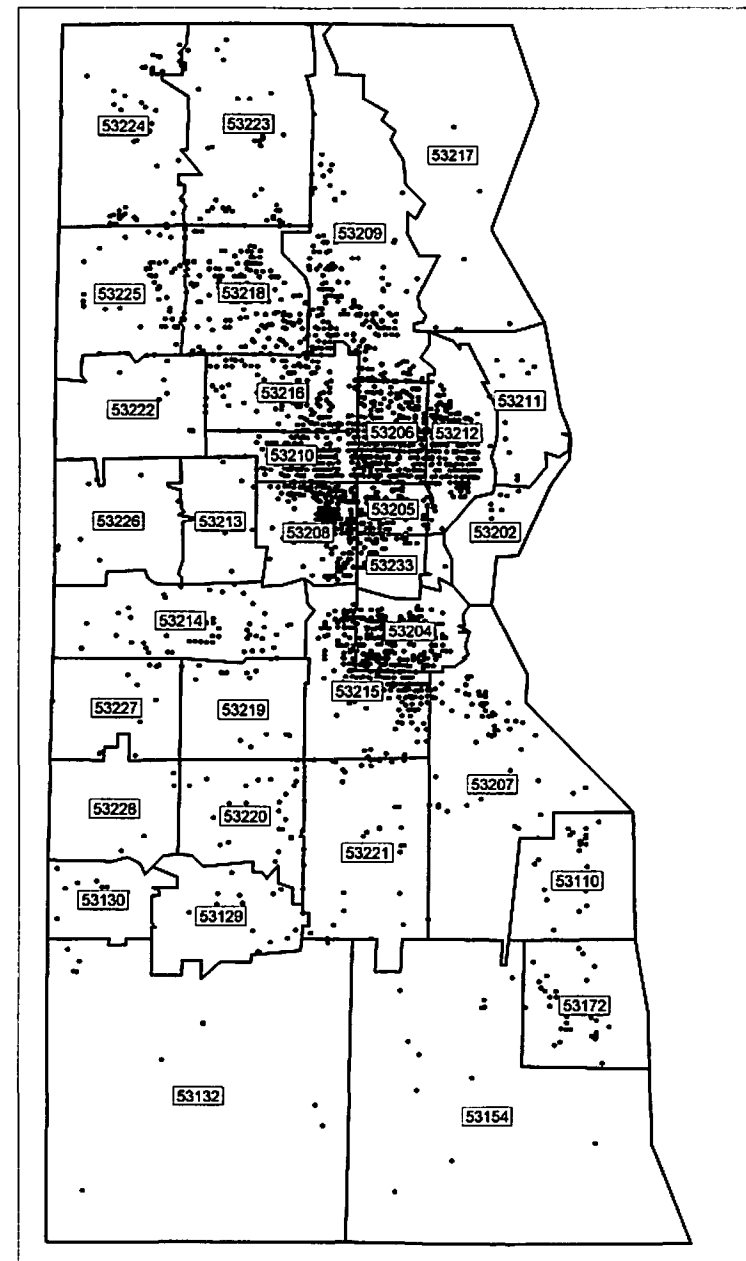
MILWAUKEE COUNTY FEMALES AGES 16, 17 AND 18

WITH VALID DRIVERS LICENSES *



N = 5970

WITH SUSPENSIONS

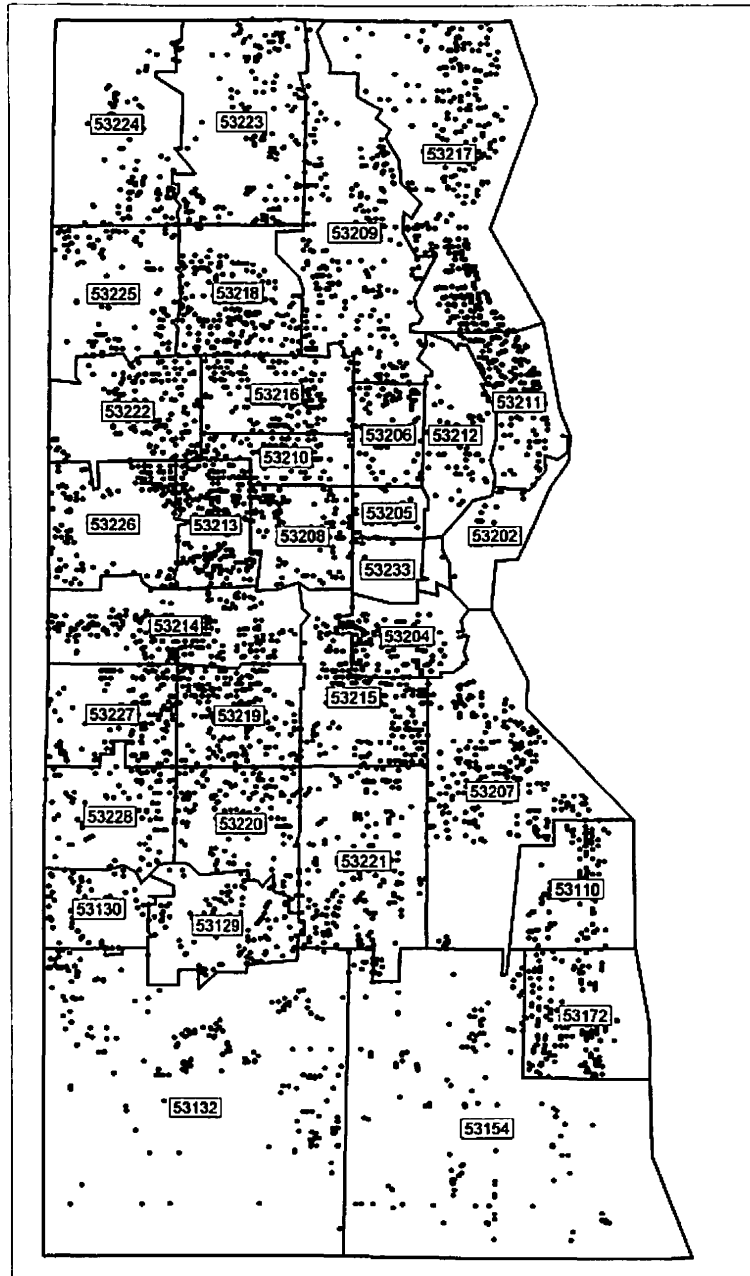


N = 3344

* STATUS AS OF 1/1/99; VALID LICENSE = LICENSE AND NO RECENT SUSPENSION OR REVOCATION

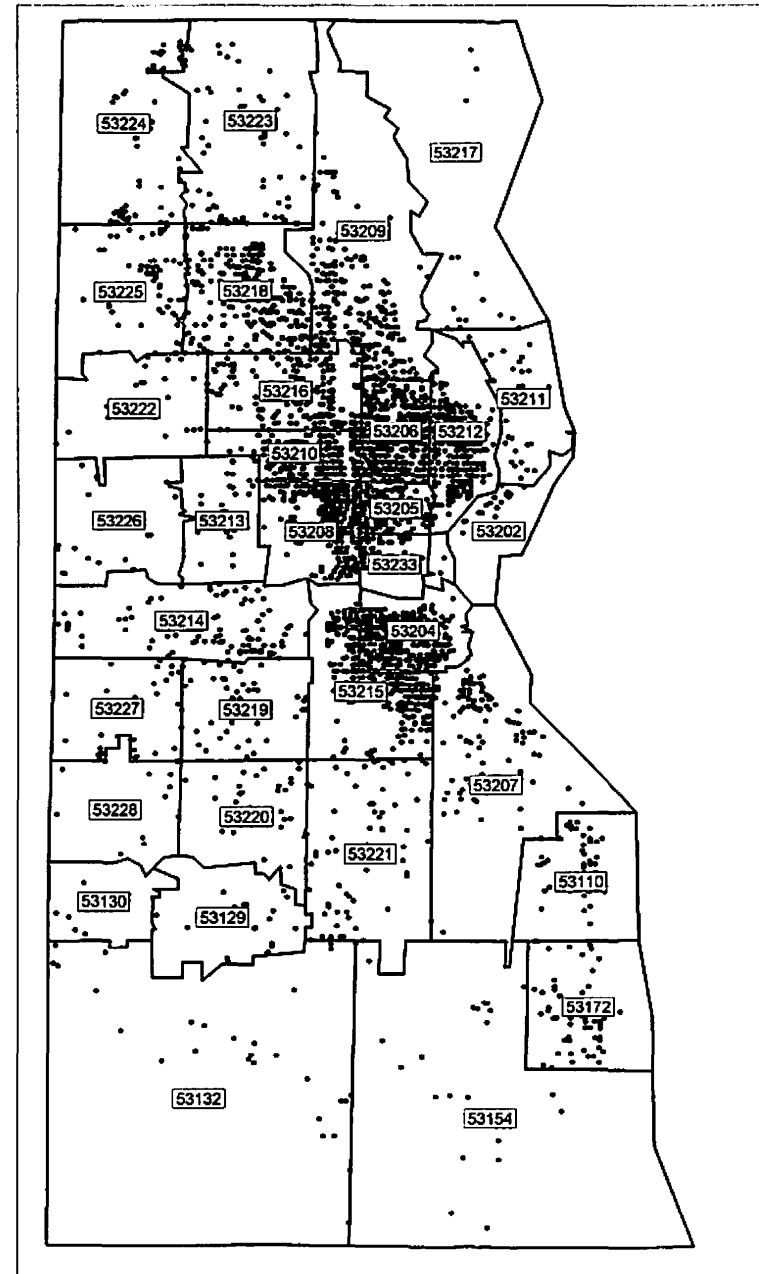
MILWAUKEE COUNTY MALES AGES 16, 17 AND 18

WITH VALID DRIVERS LICENSES *



N = 5748

WITH SUSPENSIONS



N = 5590

* STATUS AS OF 1/1/99; VALID LICENSE = LICENSE AND NO RECENT SUSPENSION OR REVOCATION