

SESSION 2

EFFECTIVENESS OF RECENT IMPAIRED DRIVER PROGRAMS

IMPAIRED DRIVING COUNTERMEASURES FOR YOUTH: THE STICK AND THE CARROT

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Young drivers continue to be a major traffic safety concern. They are overrepresented in traffic crashes and deaths. For example, 16- and 17-year-old first-year drivers have twice the average number of crashes and, compared to older drivers on a miles-driven basis, four times as many die from crashes (NHTSA, 1985). Two major factors seem to contribute to this death toll: The lack of driving experience of youth and the propensity of young drivers to engage in risky behavior, such as thrill-seeking. When alcohol is added to this already dangerous equation, the traffic risks become very great. Several different approaches have been taken to reduce the alcohol-related crash rate among young drivers. This paper will discuss two types of strategies. First, it will describe some of the policy and legislative approaches currently in use. Second, it will discuss a project currently in process that will design persuasive countermeasures based on the values and motivations of young people.

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE APPROACHES

There are two general types of legal and policy approaches that have been taken to reduce traffic crashes among youth. First are those designed to reduce youth access to alcohol; second are those designed to reduce driving by youth or to restrict the circumstances in which young people drive.

Reducing Youth Access to Alcohol

In the early 1980's, overwhelming evidence emerged that lowering the drinking age had resulted in a sharp increase in alcohol-related traffic fatalities among youth (Douglas, et al., 1974). Pressure, was therefore applied to states by the Federal government through control of highway funds, and the drinking age was raised to 21 in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. This legislative change has been very effective in saving young lives that would otherwise have been lost in alcohol-related crashes (Sweedler, 1990). The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that more than 10,000

lives have been saved since 1975 because of the increase in drinking age (NHTSA, 1991). In 1980, 53% of teenage drivers who died in highway crashes had a BAC of .10% or higher. By 1987, that figure had dropped to 28% (IIHS, 1991). Unfortunately, some of this progress has been eroded. By 1989, the downward trend had reversed and the proportion of fatally injured teenage drivers with a BAC of .10% or higher had risen to 32%.

Despite the significant progress that has been made, young people continue to drink, and they continue to die. Surveys of high school seniors indicate that 89.5% of seniors have drunk alcohol at least once, and 32.2% have drunk five or more drinks in the last two weeks - more than enough to seriously impair their driving ability (Johnston et al., 1991). A recent report by the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services points out the poor design of much drinking age legislation and the lack of serious enforcement of the laws. Research has indicated that drinking and driving are inextricably intertwined for young people and that if they drink they will drive (Klitzner et al., 1988).

Clearly, additional legislative and policy action must be taken if the lifesaving potential of minimum drinking age legislation is to be fully realized. Closing loopholes in minimum drinking age legislation and making enforcement of these laws a higher priority are essential. The pricing of alcohol (especially as prices can be manipulated through taxation) has also been shown to be effective in reducing alcohol consumption and related problems (Wagenaar and Farrell, 1989). There has also been much discussion of controlling alcohol advertising that makes alcohol seem particularly enticing to youth.

Restricting Driving by Youth

Research has indicated that all novice drivers, especially drivers under 20, have a higher crash rate than more experienced drivers (Mayhew and Simpson, 1990). Jurisdictions have tried in a variety of ways to reduce crashes among these drivers. One strategy has been to adopt older minimum ages for licensure. This has been found to be effective in reducing crashes among young drivers (Williams et al., 1983). Another strategy has been the use of provisional licenses in which the license can be lost if certain special conditions are violated. For example, some states have adopted a lower illegal alcohol level for young drivers. These laws are justified

by the fact that drinking is illegal for drivers under 21 and by the fact that young drivers are impaired at lower blood alcohol levels (Hingson and Howland, 1986). This law was found to be effective in reducing nighttime fatal crashes among teenagers in Maine, even though only 40 to 50% of teenagers knew about the law (Hingson, 1986). Some states have also placed curfews on young drivers, prohibiting them from driving during high-risk nighttime hours (Williams et al., 1983).

A similar approach is the graduated license, which combines several restrictions so that novice driving takes place in less dangerous circumstances until the driver has had the opportunity to gain experience. Restrictions are gradually lifted after the successful completion of the learning period. Graduated licensure has been implemented in two countries, New Zealand and Australia. The graduated license includes restrictions on the number and age of passengers a novice driver can carry (in order to reduce possible peer pressure to engage in risky driving), nighttime driving curfews, lowered legal blood alcohol levels, speed restrictions, compulsory seat belt use and a special license plate for probationary drivers. Evaluation of the program in New Zealand shows dramatic decreases in crashes among 15- to 17-year-olds (the main target of the program). While injury crashes have dropped about 12% overall in New Zealand, crashes among these young drivers have dropped by 40% - from an average of about 120 per month to about 70 per month (IBC, 1991).

APPROACHES BASED ON PERSUASION, VALUES, AND NORMS

As discussed above, there is still much that can be done to implement policies and legislation that can be effective in reducing alcohol-related crashes among youth. Clearly, laws and policies cannot accomplish the whole task alone. In addition, deterrence, enforcement, and legal penalties have substantial social costs, including the criminalization of large segments of the population (Ross, 1990). It would be far more desirable and cost-effective if people could simply be persuaded that impaired driving is not in the best interests of the individual or society and that it is not, therefore, in keeping with personal values or social norms.

Persuasive appeals have always been used in the impaired driving field. Messages discouraging drinking and driving come from many sources, delivered by many different media. We can all repeat a variety of slogans and themes from these campaigns. Research is now being done to improve our understanding of the motivations, values, and norms that can prevent or

promote impaired driving behavior. This understanding may make future persuasive appeals more effective.

A recent campaign in Denmark was aimed specifically at young drivers. In that campaign, 28,000 young people (mostly 17- to 19-year-olds) in one region of Denmark received a personal letter from the county along with a tape of music especially composed by a famous Danish pop group. The letter and the lyrics of the song conveyed the message that driving and drinking do not mix. The campaign also included cash prizes and T-shirts. Posters were distributed to schools, sports clubs, and other places where young people meet. Following this campaign, there was a 54% reduction in alcohol-involved crashes among 17- to 19-year-olds. No significant reductions were experienced by other age groups in that region (Studsholt, 1990).

This campaign is unique in its aggressiveness, use of multiple channels of communication, and in the degree to which it appears to be based on an understanding of what appeals to young drivers.

Pacific Institute is currently carrying out a project for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to identify ways in which several high-risk groups may be motivated to avoid impaired driving voluntarily, without the threat of punishment or other outside pressures. The project will attempt to accomplish this goal by identifying values that exert influence on the behavior of these groups and by suggesting countermeasure concepts that can be based on these values. The project will use individual interviews and focus groups to develop themes for communication to target groups, incentives that would be likely to provide motivation to avoid impaired driving, and methods of intervening in drinking and driving situations to deter impaired driving.

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EFFECTIVENESS OF ADMINISTRATIVE LICENSE REVOCATION (ALR) LAWS

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ALR is an acronym for administrative license revocation. This term is a bit misleading because the legal process to which ALR refers does not always revoke the license (in about half the states the license is suspended) and the process is not always carried out by an administrative department (in some cases, the judicial branch of government is responsible for removing the licensing privilege). However, the essential ingredient of the concept is that a person caught for alcohol-impaired driving and having a blood or breath alcohol concentration above a certain limit can lose his or her license to operate a motor vehicle *prior to conviction for the charge of alcohol-impaired driving*. Often, this procedure is referred to as *administrative per se*.

License suspension has been shown in many well-designed studies to produce specific deterrence,^{1,2} that is, it deters suspended drivers from subsequent crashes and recidivism. Although many suspended drivers continue to drive, they report driving less and/or more carefully,³ and the reductions in violations and crashes associated with license suspension continue well beyond the suspension period. Most studies of the effects of suspension on specific deterrence are based on judicial suspension, but there is no reason why administrative license suspension should not be as effective. In one study of the effects of administrative license suspension on specific deterrence, it was found that DWI recidivism was reduced in Louisiana and North Dakota and non-DWI recidivism was reduced in Mississippi.⁴ While specific deterrence is important, it is the general deterrent effect of a well-publicized and certain loss of license that is the heart of ALR. That is, the idea behind administrative license revocation or suspension is to increase the general public's perception that a significant punishment for alcohol-impaired driving is likely and thereby deter drinking and driving even among those not yet caught.