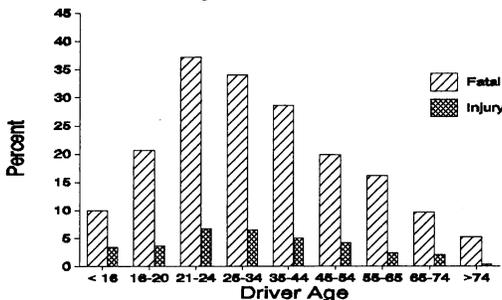


WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO DETER A DRUNK DRIVER? STUDY EXPLORES ATTITUDES OF POTENTIAL INTERVENERS

What would you do when the party ended and your good friend obviously had too much to drink? Take his keys? Call a cab? Drive him home? Sleep over? Do nothing? The choice you make can affect the lives of your friends and others. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) sponsored a series of focus groups to explore the attitudes of drinking drivers and people who may be in a position to intervene in the drinking and driving behaviors of others, and to assess the strength of media messages in motivating potential interveners.

As the figure shows, drivers between the ages of 21 to 24 have the highest percentage of alcohol involvement in both fatal and injury crashes, closely followed by those between the ages of 25 to 34.



**Percent of Driver Alcohol Involvement
for Fatal and Injury Crashes**

Source: NHTSA, *Traffic Safety Facts*, 1995

These Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) data were linked to a marketing database called CLARITAS to further define the subgroups most at risk for drinking and driving. CLARITAS gives profiles of consumers based on geodemographics, or the notion of: *YOU ARE WHERE YOU LIVE*. People of similar backgrounds, circumstances, and viewpoints tend to cluster together. The 35,000 U.S. zip codes are grouped into 40 neighborhood clusters, ranked by socioeconomic levels. The results of this analysis

showed that drivers involved in alcohol-related fatal crashes are more likely to be white, live in less affluent rural areas of the country, have a high school education or less, and work in blue collar or farming occupations than drivers in the general population.

Werby Marketing conducted a series of focus groups over a two year period in Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Texas with high risk drinking drivers (14 groups) and with the spouses or girlfriends of high risk drinking drivers (6 groups).

Focus Groups with Young Men

The young men recognized that driving after drinking alcohol was dangerous, but most claimed they were able to drive safely after consuming as many as 10-12 beers. Most believed their driving skills would enable them to avoid crashes. The men who had been involved in alcohol-related crashes tended to downplay the influence of alcohol in the crash and blamed the crash on their inattention, poor judgment, or youthful inexperience.

The reason that most of these men drive drunk is their desire to get home. Most said they do not make a conscious decision to drive drunk; they just do it. Few reported that they made explicit plans before going out drinking to avoid driving drunk. Most wanted, however, to avoid getting caught both because of the inconvenience and the financial penalties of a DWI arrest.

They identified a spouse, girlfriend, or a close friend as someone who could successfully intervene in their drinking and driving. A successful intervener would be someone familiar to the drinker who has a sincere interest in their well being. Most of the men said they would be more willing to acquiesce to women who



persuaded (as opposed to telling) them that they were not capable of driving home that night. The primary weakness of friends as potential interveners is that they are likely to be at least as drunk as the drinker.

All of the men talked about the difficulty in intervening with others who were trying to drive drunk. Younger men said it could be futile and potentially dangerous. Older men (31-35) said things like, "If that was me, I'd know I couldn't drive. I wouldn't be so insecure about myself that I'd have to put up this bravado about being able to drive."

There were regional differences in the men's willingness to be persuaded. The Texas and Iowa men appreciated a woman taking the time to look out for their best interests. The North Carolina men were more likely to listen to a male friend who intervened.

What the Women Said

The girlfriends, fiances, and spouses of the drinking men did not share the same tolerant attitude toward drinking and driving. They were more concerned with issues like having a crash or killing an innocent person whereas the men were more concerned with getting caught. All had intervened before in their partner's driving after drinking and most disliked doing so. Several women said they sometimes try to plan before the drinking occasion. They often serve as the designated driver, while expressing resentment at being "on duty".

Most of the women believe it is almost impossible to reason with an intoxicated man. "Most of the time, you can't get these idiots not to drive." Some expressed concern with the potential for violent

behavior, and others were concerned about being perceived as a "nag". Most of the women seemed to feel somewhat responsible for the safety of their spouse or boyfriend, and his friends. The older women (31-35) were more likely to take steps to intervene or arrange in advance to do the drinking at home, thus avoiding the driving issue altogether. The single women were the least likely to try to stop a drunk driver.

Potential Interveners

Close friends and female significant others are good candidates to serve as interveners in the drinking and driving of high risk young men.

Reactions to Media Messages

The last focus groups tested five commercials with both men and women aged 21 to 26 and 27 to 32. Each of the messages contained powerful visual images of innocent people who had been killed by a drunk driver. With the exception of the *Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk* message, none of the voice over messages to intervene were recalled by the participants. Both men and women responded to the emotional impact of the death of young children and missed the primary message, which was to intervene to stop a drunk driver.

To obtain single copies of *Strategic Advertising Plans to Deter Drunk Driving*, prepared by Harvard School of Public Health, write to Media and Marketing Division, NHTSA, NTS-21, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590, or send a fax to (202) 366-2727, or email Robert Ross at ross@nhtsa.dot.gov

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Traffic Safety
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