

Exploring young driver and young adult attitudes to drink-driving in NSW: Quantitative and qualitative research

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Abstract

Quantitative and qualitative research was conducted to understand NSW drivers' knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards drink-driving. Almost 30% of metro and non-metro males aged 17-25 had risked drink-driving in the prior six months, with 20% of metro females aged 17-25 and non-metro males 26-39 years also having risked drink-driving within this timeframe. While most were aware of the risks of drink-driving, at the moment of decision-making they often rationalised the behaviour to avoid inconvenience. The "grey area" of not knowing how much alcohol was too much, also appeared to be a factor in the decision.

Context

Drink-driving is a key contributor to road crashes. In the period from 2010 to 2014, it was a factor in 17% of all fatal crashes in NSW, resulting in 303 deaths. In 2014, the Centre for Road Safety commissioned quantitative research to understand the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of NSW drivers around drink-driving, and the prevalence of drink-driving in NSW. This was followed by qualitative research involving young drivers (aged 17-25) and young adults (aged 26-39).

Quantitative research

Taverner Research conducted a telephone survey of 1,761 NSW drivers aged between 17 and 69 who drink alcohol, from both metro (Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong) and non-metro areas. Respondents were recruited by calling validated, randomly generated fixed and mobile phone numbers. The research found that 47% reported driving when they were or might have been over the legal limit at least once. Multivariate analyses identified that respondents most likely to be recent drink drivers were those who justified drink driving, those who drink daily or most days, high-risk demographic groups (particularly young males), and those who believe they are unlikely to be caught. Almost 30% of young metro and non-metro males aged 17-25 had risked drink-driving in the prior six months. However, 20% of metro females aged 17-25 and non-metro males 26-39 years had also risked drink-driving within this timeframe.

Qualitative research

In light of the survey findings, the Centre for Road Safety commissioned qualitative research with a focus on young drivers and young adults, to further understand behaviours, attitudes and prevention strategies regarding drink-driving.

Snapcracker Research & Strategy ran 10 focus groups with metro males and females (aged 17-25) as well as non-metro males (aged 17-39) recruited via agency panels. While most were aware of the risks of drink-driving, both to their safety and licence, avoiding inconvenience often won out when making the decision to drink drive. Rationales included: not being certain they were over the limit; excessive cost of and/or limited access to alternative transport; feeling unsafe waiting alone for alternative transport (particularly females); and the need to take the car home to meet commitments the next day. Regular drink drivers cited money as the key issue: the cost of transport to get home

was unjustifiable, especially in rural or outer metro areas. The risk of enforcement was often discounted, with drivers reporting avoidance strategies such as using the 'backstreets', driving cautiously and knowing where police are enforcing (particularly in regional areas).

Drink-driving was reportedly more likely to happen on a night not intended for heavy drinking, where they were less likely to plan ahead. Moving from a zero alcohol condition to an unrestricted licence appeared to introduce a "grey area", where young drivers could consume alcohol but were uncertain how much put them over the limit. Provisional drivers were less likely to report drink-driving, suggesting uncertainty may be a factor in the decision to drink drive.

Implications of this research will be discussed, such as improving education to assist young adult drivers to separate drinking from driving.

References

Taverner Research (2015). 2014 Drink Driving: A Survey of NSW Drivers. Unpublished Research Report prepared for Transport for NSW.

Snapcracker Research + Strategy (2015). Young Drink Drivers – Attitudes and Underlying Causes. Unpublished Research Report prepared for Transport for NSW.