



NATIONAL SURVEY OF DRINKING AND DRIVING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS, 2001

Since 1991, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has conducted a nationally representative telephone survey every two years to measure the current status of attitudes, knowledge, and behavior of the general driving age public about drinking and driving. These surveys track the nature and scope of the drinking-driving problem (see *TRAFFIC TECHS* 89, 135, 192, 242). The Gallup Organization conducted interviews with a national sample of 6,002 persons age 16 or older in the United States between November 3 and December 23, 2001. The findings suggest that despite the public's continued concern about drinking and driving, progress in a number of key areas has slowed.

Drinking and Driving Behavior

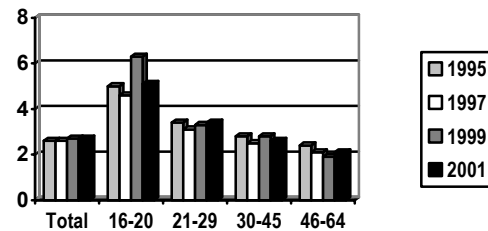
About 22% of the driving age public has driven a motor vehicle within two hours of consuming alcoholic beverages in the past year, about the same as in 1995. Males are more than twice as likely to have driven within two hours of drinking as are females (32% vs. 14%). Adults age 21 to 29 are the most likely to be drinker-drivers (37% males and 20% female) driving within two hours of alcohol consumption.

Drink-drivers made between an estimated 809 million and 1 billion driving trips within two hours of consuming alcohol in the previous year. This is a decrease of about 5% from the 1999 estimate.

On average, the drink-drivers consume 2.6 drinks within the two hours prior to driving. When the amount of alcohol, timing of drinks, and weight and gender of the drinker are taken into consideration, 2.6 drinks relates to an average blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .03. About 5% are estimated to have a BAC of .08 or higher. This calculated BAC is slightly lower in 2001 than the .04 estimated in 1999, but is similar to 1995 and 1997 estimates. Drinker-drivers under age 21 consume an average of 5.1 drinks prior to driving.

While 16-20 year olds make only about 3% of all drinking-driving trips their BAC levels are nearly three times that of legal age drinkers.

Average number of drinks on the most recent driving occasion, by age



Problem Drinkers

Problem drinkers were defined as having consumed five or more drinks on four or more days in a month, or eight or more drinks on at least one day in a typical month, or who answered yes to two or more CAGE questions (“Have you felt you should cut down on your drinking? Have people annoyed you by criticizing you about your drinking? Have you felt bad or guilty about your drinking? Have you had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?”). Overall, about 11% of the drinking public over age 16 can be classified as problem drinkers. Problem drinkers make up 27% of past year drinking-drivers, accounting for about 46% of all trips in 2001 where driving occurred within 2 hours after drinking. On their most recent drinking-driving trip, problem drinkers were estimated to have a calculated BAC of about .05 compared to .02 for other drinking-drivers.

Attitudes Toward Drinking and Driving

A majority (62%) of persons of driving age believe that they, themselves, should not drive after consuming two or more alcoholic beverages. Nearly all respondents (97%) said that drinking and driving is a threat to their personal safety, which is consistent with past surveys.

**Prevention and Intervention of Drinking and Driving**

Half of drivers (50%) 16 or older who consume alcoholic beverages report at least one occasion where they refrained from driving when they thought they might have been impaired. This is more prevalent among persons under age 30. Most of these persons rode with another driver (63%).

The proportion of persons age 16-64 who have ridden with someone in the past year who they thought may have had too much alcohol to drive safely has declined significantly from about 15% in 1991 to 12% in 2001.

About one-third (32%) of persons of driving age have been with a friend who may have had too much to drink to drive safely, including half of those under age 30. Most of these (80%) tried to stop the friend from driving and were successful in preventing the impaired person from driving about 75% of the time.

One-third (33%) of those 16 or older have ridden with a designated driver in the past year, with those aged 16-29 most likely (54%), about the same as in the past two surveys. About four in ten drivers (41%) have acted as a designated driver in the past year, consistent with 1999 levels. Designated drivers were reported to have consumed less than one-quarter of one alcoholic drink, on average, prior to driving.

Enforcement

About 1% of the driving age public report being arrested for impaired driving in the past two years. Males under age 30 were most likely to have been arrested (2%). Drinking-drivers are twice as likely, and problem drinkers were four times more likely, to have been arrested for drinking-driving violations.

Most drivers believe that once convicted of impaired driving for a first offense, drivers will receive a fine (46%) and/or a suspended or restricted license (41%). Only 20 percent think the person will go to jail. They

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generally feel that an impaired driver is more likely to have a crash than to be stopped by police, an increase since 1999. They feel that about 44% will get in a crash while the police will stop about 32%.

Penalties for Impaired Driving

Seven out of ten (71%) feel that drinking-driving penalties should be much (43%) or somewhat more (27%) severe than they are now. Drinking-drivers are much less likely to want penalties to be more severe. About one in three (32%) have seen a sobriety checkpoint in the past year, a significant increase from 1995 and consistent with 1999. About 18% have been through a checkpoint themselves at least once. A majority (62%) feels that sobriety checkpoints should be used more frequently, maintaining support consistent with 1993, but lower than 1995 to 1999.

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) Levels

Over four of five (83%) have heard of blood alcohol concentration levels, but only 27% can correctly identify the legal BAC limit for their state. Those living in .08 BAC states are more likely to correctly know their state's legal limit. More than eight of ten (88%) of those who currently reside in .08 states believe that the limit should remain at .08 or be made stricter, while 53% of those in .10 states feel that their state should lower the limit to .08. About six in ten (61%) feel that all or most drivers would be dangerous at the BAC limit in their state.

Crash Experience

One in six (16%) persons of driving age were involved in a motor vehicle crash as a driver in the past two years. Drinker-drivers (19%) were more likely to have been in a crash than other drivers. Alcohol was involved in about 2% of all reported crashes, and in 4% of crashes by male drivers.

HOW TO ORDER

For a copy of *National Survey of Drinking and Driving Attitudes and Behaviors, 2001*, write to the Office of Research and Technology, NHTSA, NTI-131, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590 or send a fax to (202) 366-7096. Marvin Levy, Ph.D., was the contract manager for this project.