

Using Research to Prevent Impaired Driving

By Allison Jacobs

Alcohol-impaired driving crashes still account for one-third of all traffic-related deaths in the United States. The annual cost of alcohol-related crashes totals more than \$51 billion. Facts such as these continue to drive efforts in communities around the country to reduce impaired driving. Through an agreement funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), CADCA supports local efforts to adopt and implement evidence-based strategies to reduce impaired driving. Under this project, CADCA focuses on bridging the research and practice divide by disseminating evidence-based impaired driving policies and practices to coalition practitioners.

At the 2014 Mid-Year Training Institute in Orlando, Florida, CADCA hosted a one-day course for coalition attendees to learn about and discuss current research to prevent impaired driving. Five leading researchers from the United States and Canada discussed findings from their own studies, including: trends in alcohol and drug-impaired driving, effective interventions, challenges of enforcement, and community implementation case studies.

Researchers

Jane Maxwell, Ph.D.

Senior Research Scientist
School of Social Work, University of Texas at Austin

Research Interests: trends and patterns of substance abuse in Texas, nationally, and internationally, with special interest on the US-Mexico border; research in patterns of use and abuse of methamphetamine, party drugs, methadone, and other opiate drugs; impaired driving programs; and synthetic estimation techniques.

Maxwell highlighted work from her research investigating the characteristics of drivers with DUIs that were admitted to substance abuse treatment. Her study identified the following:

- DWI Probation was the number one referral source of impaired drivers entering Texas treatment with DWI/DUI.
- Heroin and other opiate users cited on average 15 days of problems with substance abuse, employment, family, social relations, and sickness in past month.
- Favorite drug combinations of impaired drivers at treatment admission include 5-6 substances, such as alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, meth, heroin, sedatives, and other opiates.

Robyn Robertson

President and CEO
Traffic Injury Research Foundation

Research Interests: justice system, impaired drivers, high-risk offenders, distraction, fatigue, alcohol monitoring and photo enforcement technologies, risk assessment and treatment, older drivers and knowledge transfer.

Robertson presented findings from her research regarding profiles of impaired drivers and ignition interlock programs. She offered the following insights from her work:

- For males, demographic, substance use, criminality, and antisocial factors increase with higher number of offenses.
- Data shows small increases in female involvement in alcohol-impaired fatal crashes, but large increases in DWI arrests.
- Alcohol interlocks can reduce recidivism among first and repeat offenders. However, treatment is needed to support long-term behavior change.

Robert Saltz, Ph.D.

Senior Research Scientist, Prevention Research Center
Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE)

Research Interests: Saltz's work has centered on ways in which drinking contexts may influence the risk of subsequent injury or death. He has conducted several studies on "responsible beverage service" programs that seek to have bar and restaurant personnel intervene to reduce the risk of intoxication or of driving while impaired.

Saltz highlighted findings from the Safer California Universities Project that evaluated the efficacy of a "risk management" approach to alcohol problem prevention. As part of the project, a number of integrated intervention strategies for off-campus parties were implemented at intervention schools, such as compliance checks, DUI checkpoints, party patrols, etc. In comparison to the control schools, the Safer intervention

schools had an equivalent of 6,000 fewer incidents of intoxication at off-campus parties and 4,000 fewer incidents at bars & restaurants.

Traci L. Toomey, Ph.D.

Professor, School of Public Health,
Division of Epidemiology and Community Health
Director of the Alcohol Epidemiology Program
University of Minnesota

Research Interests: policy research; community organizing; prevention of alcohol and tobacco-related problems; and intentional and unintentional injury prevention.

Toomey presented findings from her team's Minnesota Alcohol Policy Information System (APIS) Project to investigate the involvement of enforcement in impaired driving strategies. An enforcement survey was given to local and state-level enforcement agencies to assess their involvement in four enforcement areas: underage provision, underage sales, impaired driving, and overservice. The results indicate that when local law enforcement agencies:

- Enforce impaired driving strategies they have less self-reported impaired driving in their communities.
- Employ a full-time officer to alcohol enforcement they are more successful in reducing impaired driving.

Mark Wolfson, Ph.D.

Professor, Department of Social Sciences and Health Policy
Wake Forest University School of Medicine

Research Interests: intended and unintended effects of policies and programs addressing tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use by youth and young adults, and the interaction of nonprofits and government organizations in shaping public policy on alcohol, tobacco, and drug use.

Wolfson highlighted the findings from his work on NHTSA's Demonstration Project on High Visibility Enforcement (HVE) on Underage Drinking. The project utilized four community coalitions to plan and support local law enforcement in conducting 6-7 HVE Waves in their communities. Each community chose a diverse mix of enforcement strategies, including saturation patrols, compliance checks, party patrols, etc. In addition, media corresponded with the waves of enforcement. Wolfson and his colleagues found:

- The number of citations and arrests varied by operation type and community. Compliance checks yielded the highest citations per officer hours.
- There was a dramatic increase in citations, specifically underage drinking or possession.
- All sites generated a variety of earned media, including social media, newspaper/magazine, TV, radio, etc.
- Decreases in the following behaviors: high school drinking & driving, 30-day drinking, and provision of alcohol to someone under 21 years of age.

The results indicate that community coalitions should coordinate their media and enforcement efforts, choose a good media message, strategize the best mix of enforcement strategies, avoid punishing youth without holding adults responsible, and evaluate.