

Journal of Safety Research

Available online 4 September 2017

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Perceptions of alcohol-impaired driving and the blood alcohol concentration standard in the United States

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[DOI: 10.1016/j.jsr.2017.08.013](#)

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ts

rd of US drivers of legal drinking age supported lowering the legal BAC
d for driving.

, 63.9% of respondents indicated that lowering the BAC to .05% would have
t on their decisions to drink and drive.

30% of respondents lacked accurate knowledge of their state's BAC
d.

dy results are useful for state traffic safety professionals and policy makers
to have a better understanding of the public's perceptions of and thoughts about
BAC standards.

Abstract

Introduction

Although the number of alcohol-impaired driving (AID) fatalities has declined over the past several years, AID continues to be a serious public health problem in the United States. The purpose of this effort was to gain a better understanding of the U.S. driving population's perceptions and thoughts about the impacts of lowering the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) driving standard below .08% on AID, health, and other outcomes.

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Methods

The project team completed this task through a questionnaire administered to a nationally representative sample of licensed drivers in the United States (n = 1,011) who were of legal age to consume alcohol (age 21 or older). The questionnaire topics were: driving habits, alcohol consumption habits, drinking and driving habits, attitudes about drinking and driving, experiences with and opinions of drinking and driving laws, opinions about strategies to reduce drinking and driving, general concerns about traffic safety issues, and demographics.

Results

One-third of participants supported lowering the legal BAC standard, and participants rated a BAC standard of .05% to be moderately acceptable on average. Overall, 63.9% of respondents indicated that lowering the BAC to .05% would have no effect on their

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...averaged about 5. Nearly 60% of respondents lacked accurate knowledge of the BAC standard.

...is

...support for lowering the BAC standard was moderate and was at least partially influenced by concerns about the impacts of a change in the BAC standard. The results suggest that an opportunity exists for better educating the U.S. driving population about existing BAC standards and the implications for lowering the BAC level on traffic injury prevention.

...applications

...results are useful for state traffic safety professionals and policy makers to increase their understanding of the public's perceptions of and thoughts about BAC standards. Given the relationship between perceived impacts and public support for the BAC standard, there is a clear need for more research into the effects of the BAC standard on crashes, arrests, AID behavior, and alcohol-related

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Eby is a Research Professor and Head of the Behavioral Sciences Group of the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) where he has been working since 1993. He is also the Director of the Center for Advancing Transportation Leadership and Safety (ATLAS Center), a University Transportation Center sponsored by the US Department of Transportation. He holds a doctorate degree in experimental psychology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has also held a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Cognitive Sciences at the University of California, Irvine. While at UMTRI, Dr. Eby's research has focused on reducing the number of deaths and injuries associated with motor-vehicle crashes by conducting behavioral research that improves the safety of automobile transportation. An important component of this work has been to improve the safety and mobility of older drivers. Dr. Eby is a former convener for the Transportation and Aging Interest Group of Gerontological Society of America (GSA) and is a fellow of GSA. He is a former Associate Editor of the journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention* and the lead author of a book called *Maintaining Safe Mobility in an Aging Society*.

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