Louisiana's Alcohol-Impaired Driving Problem: An Analysis of Crash and Cultural Factors

INTRODUCTION

Though alcohol-involved driving fatalities have declined overall since 2013, it is still a severe public health problem in Louisiana. Alcohol-involved driving fatalities accounted for more than 38 percent of all Louisiana's vehicle fatalities in 2018. Though national trends regarding culture and drinking are well documented, behaviors specific to Louisiana's diverse cultural makeup are not. This analysis addresses this need.

OBJECTIVE

This project sought to improve roadway safety by reducing alcohol-involved crashes through:
- synthesizing and documenting existing resources for assessing alcohol-involved driving,
- identifying community and cultural influences contributing to impaired driving in Louisiana, and
- developing an interactive web tool for systemic risk assessment.

SCOPE

The scope of this project addressed the alcohol-involved driving problem in Louisiana through six tasks.
1. Review issue literature and data sources.
2. Perform a statewide systemic data analysis to identify high-risk factors and geographic locations with a greater potential for alcohol-involved crashes.
3. Survey Louisianians to identify knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and cultural aspects relating to drinking and driving (including ideas to reduce the behavior and improve roadway safety).
4. Produce an interim report.
5. Survey DUI/DWI offenders and conduct structured interviews with key stakeholders engaged with DUI/DWI offenders to better understand the population and how to help them.
6. Write a final report and design a web tool for systemic data analysis at the parish- and census-block group levels.

METHODOLOGY

Task 1 involved a traditional review of issue literature and data sources for understanding alcohol-involved driving and culture. An important effort in highway safety analysis involves identifying locations that might need engineering improvements, effective programs or policies, or enhanced enforcement of laws to reduce targeted crashes. For Task 2, the research team performed a systemic analysis to identify key risk factors at the parish- and census block-group levels.

The analysis revealed the areas in Louisiana in greatest need of effective countermeasures and strategies to reduce crashes. Results formed the basis of a web-based interactive tool that offers parish-level data on a wide array of variables. Users can overlay alcohol-involved crashes and evaluate the interrelationship between cultural/relevant features and alcohol-involved crashes at the parish- and census block-group levels.

Under Task 3, a self-administered online survey assessed Louisianians' knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and cultural assumptions related to drinking and driving and how behavior might be modified and roadway safety improved. The research team analyzed the data (n = 411) using descriptive statistics. Task 5 provided a greater understanding of DUI/DWI by conducting (1) a self-administered online survey of adult DWI/

DUI offenders (n = 61) and (2) structured phone interviews (n = 19) with Louisiana stakeholders engaged with DUI/DWI offenders including police officers, probation officers, pastors, counselors/therapists, defense attorneys, and assistant district attorneys. Researchers analyzed survey data using descriptive statistics and examined interview data to identify key themes.
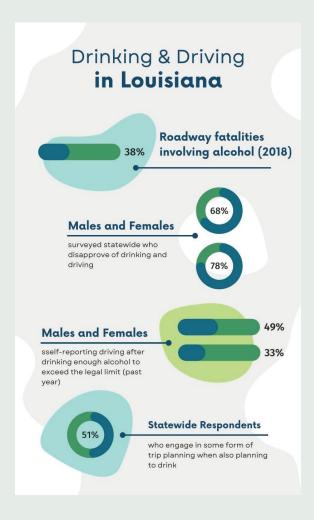
CONCLUSIONS

Researchers found several demographic, cultural, and religion-based factors at the parish level that could increase the frequency of alcohol-involved crashes. Implementing more protective factors against at-risk behavior in younger drivers might mitigate the frequency of alcohol-involved crashes for everyone.

The statewide survey indicates that most respondents disapprove of drinking and driving. However, many self-reported driving after drinking enough alcohol to be over the legal limit in the past year, and some even reporting drinking while driving. Many younger respondents also perceived the problem of drinking and driving as worsening.

Half reported always engaging in some form of trip planning when they also planned to drink. Making alternative transportation modes more attractive and readily available—thereby encouraging planning trips ahead—can potentially reduce drinking and driving. More proactive interventions and preventive measures like sobriety checkpoints received some support from respondents, especially when paired with events and festivals.

Both the stakeholder-structured interviews and the DUI/DWI offender survey identified the importance of family history and cultural traditions of alcohol use as important factors influencing attitudes about drinking in general and DUI- and DWI-related driving behaviors specifically.

Drinking & Driving in Louisiana

Roadway fatalities involving alcohol (2018) — 38%

Males and Females surveyed statewide who disapprove of drinking and driving — 68% / 78%

Males and Females sself-reporting driving after drinking enough alcohol to exceed the legal limit (past year) — 49% / 33%

Statewide Respondents who engage in some form of trip planning when also planning to drink — 51%

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use the web tool for systemic assessment and continue to develop GIS-mapping initiatives to understand both geographic and cultural influences on drinking and driving.
- Promote culture as a continuous factor requiring re-examination to better understand the connection between drinking and driving.
- Recognize that drinking and driving is a statewide problem (i.e., neither exclusively urban nor solely occurring in southern Louisiana).
- Identify and promote multiple transportation modes to empower individuals who have been drinking (and might otherwise drive) to safely get home. Creative options are needed, including expanding access to ride-share programs such as Uber and Lyft.
- Expand substance abuse treatment programs across the state.
- Enhance public education campaigns about the dangers of drinking and driving.