

ITSMR Research Note



KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ Drinking and driving was identified as the most serious traffic safety problem in New York State by the largest proportion of the respondents.
- ❖ 80% felt police enforcement of the drinking and driving laws was very strict or somewhat strict.
- ❖ 84% believe someone arrested for drinking and driving will be convicted.
- ❖ 84% think drivers should be evaluated to see if they have a serious drinking problem after the first impaired driving offense.
- ❖ 57% believe that an interlock device should be placed on the offender's vehicle; an additional 37% felt an interlock should be required after the second offense.

A Study on Drinking and Driving in New York State: Survey of Drivers

ABSTRACT

The Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research (ITSMR) recently completed an impaired driving research study to establish an estimate of how many motorists drink and drive and how often they engage in this behavior, and what would influence drinking drivers to change their behavior. The study involved a telephone survey of 865 randomly selected New York drivers and focus groups of drivers convicted of drinking and driving. The telephone survey captured information on New York State drivers' perceptions, attitudes, knowledge and experiences related to drinking and driving. Key findings from the telephone survey are noted in the box on the left.

INTRODUCTION

Impaired driving continues to be a program priority for traffic safety advocates in New York State. Innovative legislation, enforcement efforts, and public information campaigns that target the problem of impaired driving have helped make New York's impaired driving fatal crash rate among the lowest in the nation (28% in New York vs. 32% nationally in 2008). Although New York's low fatal crash rate is noteworthy, it is on an upward trend, rising from 24% in 2004 to 28% in 2008.

To address continuing concerns related to impaired driving, the New York State Governor's Traffic Safety Committee (GTSC) recently funded the Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research (ITSMR) to conduct a

study to estimate how many motorists drink and drive and how often, and what would influence drinking drivers to change their behavior. The study involved a telephone survey of New York drivers and focus groups of drivers convicted of drinking and driving. This research note reports on the key findings from the telephone survey.

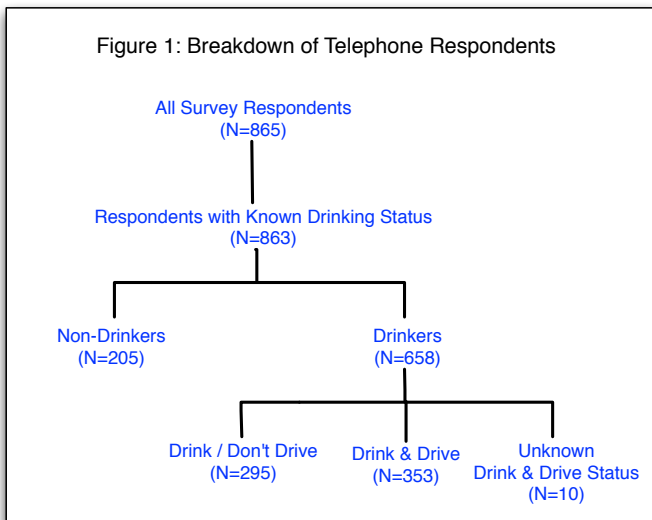
TELEPHONE SURVEY OF NEW YORK DRIVERS

The telephone survey was conducted by Fact Finders, Inc., a marketing research firm in Albany, New York. The survey was designed to provide representative and reliable measurements of New York State drivers' perceptions, attitudes, knowledge and experiences related to drinking and driving.

In order to reliably measure public opinion in New York State, a scientific random probability sample was designed. The sample was comprised of 865 randomly selected drivers residing in New York State and driving at least a few times a year.

Survey Population

Of the 865 survey respondents, 863 provided information on whether or not they drink alcoholic beverages and whether they drive after drinking. As shown in Figure 1, this information was used to divide the survey population into non-drinkers (205) and drinkers (658) and to then divide the population of drinkers into those who said they do not drive after drinking (295) and those who said they drink and drive (353).



Perception of Traffic Safety Problems

All 865 respondents were asked to identify what they think is the most serious traffic problem overall from a list that was read to them. As shown in Table 1, the largest proportion of the respondents thought that drunk driving was the most serious problem (28%), followed by talking or texting on cell phones (27%) and aggressive driving (13%).

Table 1: Most Serious Traffic Problem	
All things considered, what do you think is the one most serious traffic problem? (N = 865)	
Drunk driving	28%
Cell phone use (talking/texting)	27%
Aggressive driving	13%
Speeding	9%
Intersections/Red lights	4%
High traffic volume	3%
Road conditions (potholes, signage)	3%
Distracted driving	2%
Inexperienced young drivers	2%
Other	6%
No opinion/Not answered	3%

Likelihood of Being Stopped

Survey respondents were asked their perception of being stopped by the police if they were driving after drinking too much. Of the 865 respondents, 74% felt that it was “very likely” or “somewhat likely” that a drunk driver would be stopped by the police (Table 2). Seventeen percent thought that it was “not too likely” or “not likely at all.”

Table 2: Likelihood of Being Stopped	
How likely is someone to be stopped by the police in your area if they are driving after drinking too much? (N = 865)	
Very likely	28%
Somewhat likely	46%
Not too likely	15%
Not likely at all	2%
No opinion/Not answered	10%

Likelihood of Conviction

When asked about the likelihood of being convicted if they were arrested for drinking and driving, the majority of respondents (84%) felt that people were “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to be convicted of drinking and driving (Table 3).

Table 3: Likelihood of Conviction

If someone is arrested for drinking and driving, how likely do you think they are to be convicted? (N = 865)	
Very likely	42%
Somewhat likely	42%
Not too likely	9%
Not likely at all	1%
No opinion/Not answered	6%

Penalties

To determine their knowledge of the penalties associated with the first conviction for drinking and driving, all 865 respondents were asked about the penalties they thought someone would receive if convicted of drinking and driving. Table 4 summarizes those responses. The top answers were license suspension or revocation (48%) and a fine (42%), followed by DWI school/Drinking Driver Program (11%) and probation (11%).

Table 4: Knowledge of Impaired Driving Penalties

Let's say someone is convicted of drinking and driving and it was their first conviction. What penalty do you think they should receive? (N=865)	
License suspension or revocation	48%
Fine	42%
DWI school/Drinking Driver Program	11%
Probation	11%
Community service	8%
Jail	7%
Points on license	5%
Alcohol/Drug treatment	4%
Verbal warning	3%
Other	12%
No opinion/Not answered	16%

Note: Total sums to more than 100% because survey respondents were allowed up to three responses.

Costs

The survey also sought to collect information on opinions regarding at what cost people who drink and drive would change their behavior. As shown in

Table 5, 20% said the cost would have to be at least \$10,000. Another 20% said that no amount would be high enough to cause those who drink and drive to change their behavior.

Table 5: Opinions Related to Costs for Impaired Driving Convictions

At what total cost do you think most people would reduce the number of times they drink and drive? (N = 865)	
Less than \$1,000	6%
\$1,000 - \$2,499	14%
\$2,500 - \$4,999	3%
\$5,000 - \$9,999	14%
\$10,000 or over	20%
No Amount	20%
No opinion/Not answered	23%

Attitudes on Evaluation and Ignition Interlock

Another objective of the survey was to determine opinions and attitudes regarding 1) the evaluation of convicted drinking drivers for a serious drinking problem and 2) the installation of an ignition interlock device on vehicles driven by convicted drinking drivers. Table 6 indicates that 84% of all 865 survey respondents agreed that persons should be evaluated to see if they have a serious drinking problem after the first impaired driving offense; 13% said that persons should be evaluated after two or more offenses; 3% believed that persons should not be evaluated.

Table 6: Attitudes Toward Evaluation of Convicted Drinking Drivers

All persons convicted should be evaluated to see if they have a serious drinking problem... (N = 865)	
After the first offense	84%
After two or more offenses	13%
Persons convicted of drinking and driving should not be evaluated	3%

Table 7 shows that 57% believe that an ignition interlock should be installed after conviction on a first offense and 37% thought this device should be required after two or more offenses. Only 5% of the

respondents thought that ignition interlock should not be required for any convicted drinking drivers.

Table 7: Attitudes Toward Ignition Interlock for Convicted Drinking Drivers	
All persons convicted should be required to have an ignition interlock device placed on their vehicle to prevent them from driving after drinking... (N = 865)	
After the first offense	57%
After two or more offenses	37%
Persons convicted of drinking and driving should not be required to have an ignition interlock	5%
No opinion/Not answered	1%

Reducing Drinking and Driving

When asked a general question regarding what should be done to reduce drinking and driving, 21% of the respondents thought that more enforcement was needed and 15% thought education was the key (Table 8). Various changes to the penalties assessed for impaired driving offenses were also mentioned, including the fines (10%) and license sanctions (5%) imposed; 6% thought stricter penalties in general were needed.

Table 8: Opinions on How to Reduce Drinking and Driving	
In your opinion, what should be done to reduce drinking and driving? (N = 865)	
More DWI enforcement	21%
Education	15%
Fine	10%
Stricter penalties	6%
License suspension/Revocation	5%
Jail	5%
Greater awareness of DWI	4%
Bar related (e.g., server training)	4%
Ignition interlock	3%
Other	12%
No opinion/Not answered	15%

Communication Methods

When asked their opinion on communicating messages about drinking and driving the majority of respondents (63%) said that television was the best way to reach them (Table 9). The internet was second with 14%, followed by radio (8%) and billboards (7%).

Table 9: Communication Methods	
What is the best way to reach you with messages about drinking and driving? (N = 865)	
Television	63%
Internet	14%
Radio	8%
Billboards	7%
Newspaper	5%
Other	2%
No opinion/Not answered	1%

Drinking Behavior

A series of questions were asked only of those who said they consume alcohol (N=658). The majority of drivers who consume alcohol report that they drink occasionally (65%), 16% drink only on weekends, 11% drink three or four times a week, and 7% drink daily (Table 10).

Table 10: Frequency of Consuming Alcohol	
Would you say you have at least one drink... (N = 658)	
Daily	7%
3 to 4 times a week	11%
Weekends only	16%
Occasionally	65%
No opinion/Not answered	1%

When asked whether they drink differently if they think they have to drive, 75% said that they did. Those who reported that they do drink differently when they have to drive were then asked what they do differently. As indicated in Table 11, almost half (48%) of the respondents said they don't drink at all. More than a third (37%) of the respondents said they drink less, and only 5% said they use a designated driver or let someone else drive.

Table 11: Drinking and Driving Decisions

Do you drink differently if you think you have to drive? (N = 658)	
Yes	75%
No	22%
No opinion/Not answered	3%
(If yes) What do you do differently? (N = 488)	
Don't drink at all	48%
Drink less	37%
Use a designated driver/Let someone else drive	5%
Wait before driving	4%
Eat/Drink non-alcoholic beverages	3%
Other	3%

The survey respondents who reported that they consume alcohol were also asked their opinion on how many drinks they think make you unsafe to drive. Table 12 shows that the majority of respondents (56%) said that they felt unsafe to drive after 1 or 2 drinks and 29% said having 3 or 4 drinks would make them unsafe to drive. Six percent felt that it would take 5 or more drinks before they became unsafe to drive.

Table 12: Unsafe to Drive

After how many drinks do you consider yourself unsafe to drive? (N = 658)	
1 or 2 drinks	56%
3 or 4 drinks	29%
5 or more drinks	6%
No opinion/Not answered	9%

Deterrents to Drinking and Driving

More than half (54%) of the 658 survey respondents who consume alcohol said that they had driven after having one or more drinks in the past year. These respondents were then asked what would have the greatest deterrent effect on them. As shown in Table 13, over half (53%) said that the fear of hurting someone would have the greatest influence on getting them to stop or reduce how often they drink and drive. The next most frequent responses were the \$5,000-\$10,000 costs associated with drinking

and driving convictions (19%) and the loss of the driver's license (10%).

Table 13: Greatest Influence to Stop Drinking and Driving

For you, which of the following would have the greatest influence on stopping or reducing how often you drink and drive? (N = 353)	
Fear of hurting someone	53%
Cost of \$5,000 to \$10,000	19%
Loss of license	10%
Arrest and booking	9%
Vehicle being impounded	3%
Ignition interlock	2%
No opinion/Not answered	4%

Comparison of Drinkers Who Drive After Drinking and Those Who Do Not

Additional analyses were conducted to gain further insight into the characteristics of persons who indicate they drink but do not drive after drinking (N=295) and those who report that they drink and drive (N=353). All of the differences reported on below were statistically significant at the .05 level.

As Table 14 shows, 75% of those who do not drive after drinking usually consume only one or two drinks compared to 62% of those who reported that they drink and drive. In addition, 37% of those who drink and drive usually consume three or more drinks compared to the 25% of those who do not drive after drinking. In other words, those who admit that they drive after drinking usually consume more drinks than those who do not drink and drive.

Table 14: Number of Drinks Consumed Differences by Drinking/Driving Status

When you drink alcohol, how many drinks do you usually have?	Drink/Do Not Drive (N=295)	Drink and Drive (N=353)
More than 10 drinks	<1%	<1%
5 to 10	6%	5%
3 or 4	19%	31%
1 or 2	75%	62%
No opinion/Not answered	0%	<1%

There were also significant differences between these two groups in the frequency of drinking (Table 15). Nearly one-quarter (24%) of the respondents who report that they drink and drive consume alcohol at least three to four times a week and 8% drink daily. In comparison, 10% of those who drink but do not drive after drinking consume alcohol at least three to four times a week.

Table 15: Frequency of Drinking Differences by Drinking/Driving Status

Would you say you have at least one drink...	Drink/Do Not Drive (N=295)	Drink and Drive (N=353)
Daily	4%	8%
3 to 4 times a week	6%	16%
Weekends only	11%	20%
Occasionally	79%	55%
No opinion/Not answered	0%	1%

Support for placing an ignition interlock on a vehicle to prevent a driver from drinking and driving differed significantly by the drinking and driving behavior reported by the survey respondents. Not surprisingly, the persons most at risk are the drivers least likely to support the use of an ignition interlock device. As shown in Table 16, 73% of the drivers who do not drink alcohol were in favor of requiring an ignition interlock after the first drinking and driving offense, compared to 59% of the drivers who drink but do not drive, and 46% of the drivers who admit to drinking and driving.

SUMMARY

Over the past few decades, the traffic safety community has focused a great deal of attention on developing and implementing initiatives to prevent motorists from drinking and driving. Although many of those initiatives have taken a general deterrence approach designed to raise the perception that the risk of arrest is great, there is a concern that the perceptions of those developing such initiatives do not match those of the general motoring public. To address this concern, the telephone survey was designed to identify drivers’ perceptions and opinions related to various aspects of the drinking and driving issue, especially drivers’ perceptions and opinions related to risk of arrest and likelihood of conviction, and the penalties and sanctions that should be imposed on drivers convicted of drinking and driving.

The key findings from the survey indicate that three-quarters of the drivers interviewed have the perception that the risk of arrest is “very” or “somewhat” likely if they drink and drive; eight out of 10 think the likelihood of being convicted if arrested is also “very” or “somewhat” likely. With respect to penalties and sanctions, a large majority of the drivers surveyed (84%) believed that all persons convicted of drinking and driving should be evaluated after a first offense to determine whether they have a serious drinking problem. More than half of the drivers surveyed felt that ignition interlock devices should be installed on vehicles driven by convicted drivers after the first offense.

Table 16: Attitudes Toward Ignition Interlock for Convicted Drinking Drivers Differences by Drinking/Driving Status

All persons convicted should be required to have an ignition interlock device placed on their vehicle to prevent them from driving after drinking...	Do Not Drink (N=205)	Drink/Do Not Drive (N=295)	Drink and Drive (N=353)
After the first offense	73%	59%	46%
After two or more offenses	22%	36%	46%
Persons convicted of drinking and driving should not be required to have an ignition interlock	3%	4%	7%
No opinion/Not answered	2%	<1%	1%

In general, the findings from the telephone survey, when contrasted with the results from the focus groups consisting of convicted drinking drivers, raise a number of interesting questions. For example, can the drinking and driving population be divided into two distinct groups? The findings suggest that one group of drivers hears and believes the message that if you drink and drive you will be arrested, which deters them from drinking and driving. A second group of drivers, however, has had the experience of drinking and driving on a regular basis and not getting caught, which tells them the message that “you will be arrested if you drink and drive” is largely false. The findings from the telephone survey

together with those of the focus groups provide the traffic safety community an unprecedented opportunity both to identify and address such questions and to re-examine the issue of drinking and driving from various drivers’ perspectives.

Note: A separate research note on the primary focus of this study, which was establishing an estimate of how many New Yorkers drink and drive and how often, was published in November 2009 and is available on the Institute’s website (www.itsmr.org). A research note on the focus groups that were conducted as part of this study was published in December 2009 and is also available on the Institute’s website.

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