Recent Developments in Preventing Drinking and Driving in Germany

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ABSTRACT

The convictions for DWI since the year 1988 are continuously increasing. In the year 1992 140,000 driver licences were withdrawn for DWI - 6.6 percent more than in 1991. 36 percent of them are drivers between 21 and 30 years, 8 percent are women. The accident involvement of DWI decreased in the FRG in the last two decades from 14 to 9 percent, the amount of injured DWI diminished from 15 to 10 percent. An adverse development is observed in the new Bundesländer (former GDR) since 1990 - there the alcohol accidents increased from 9 to 15 percent and the injured DWI from 8 to 16 percent. Recent results of polls proved, that the public opinion increasingly turns against DWI. Regional road block tests during the last two years demonstrated, that 3 percent of the drivers exceeded the legal limit of .08 BAC. But on the other hand the low enforcement and sanction rate of DWI is well known in Germany: only 2 percent of DWI are detected and punished or convicted. Recent in-depth studies and motivational analysis came to the result, that enforcement strategies and sanctioning systems should be integrated in a wider concept of long term information campaigns and educational programs. Some examples of those German approaches in the fields of general prevention of the public as well as of individual improvement of DWI by screening systems and rehabilitation programs are given. In recent evaluation studies the well established and integrated system of medico-psychological assessment together with rehabilitations programs for DWI were proved significantly effective in decreasing the recidivism rate of some 45,000 program participants per year in Germany.

TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS DUE TO DRIVING WHILE INTOXICATED (DWI)

During the last two decades, the accidents due to DWI have decreased from 14 to 9 % of the total traffic accident occurrence in the Federal Republic of Germany (Federal Statistical Office, 1993).

The proportion of casualties from DWI accidents diminished from 15 to 10 %, the DWI-related fatalities from 22 to 19 % (Table 1). An opposite development has been observed in the new federal states (former GDR) since 1990: here, the traffic accidents caused by alcohol increased from 9 to 15 %, the DWI-related casualties from 8 to 16 % and the fatalities from 15 to 21 % (Table 2).

This means that the proportion of DWI car drivers and motorcyclists involved in casualty accidents never had been as low as in 1992 in the former FRG, whereas it reached its highest level in the former GDR. Fortunately, the global accident figures in the new federal states...

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states and in Berlin East came to a stop or are even decreasing since 1993... also with regard to the DWI-related accidents.

### Table 1
Traffic Accidents, Alcohol Accidents and Injuries 1975 - 1992 in the FRG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>accidents with injuries</th>
<th>injured</th>
<th>fatalities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1975</strong></td>
<td>337 732</td>
<td>472 667</td>
<td>14 870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1992</strong></td>
<td>325 301</td>
<td>433 081</td>
<td>7 298</td>
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**alcohol accidents**

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<tr>
<td><strong>1975</strong></td>
<td>48 346</td>
<td>72 444</td>
<td>3 318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1992</strong></td>
<td>30 177</td>
<td>41 812</td>
<td>1 407</td>
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**% of the total**

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<tr>
<td><strong>1975</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1992</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
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The outstandingly severe consequences of alcohol-related accidents are illustrated by the following figures of 1992: as regards the total number of casualty accidents, 27 persons were killed and 330 severely injured per 1000 accidents; for DWI accidents, the numbers were 51 casualties and 515 severely injured per 1000 accidents (Federal Statistical Office, 1993). Apart from that, single-vehicle accidents resulting from DWI are twice as frequent than the average of the accidents involving only one vehicle.

### Table 2
Traffic Accidents, Alcohol Accident and Injuries 1975 - 1992 in the neue Bundesländer (former GDR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>accidents with injuries</th>
<th>injured</th>
<th>fatalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1975</strong></td>
<td>37 450</td>
<td>49 141</td>
<td>2 141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1992</strong></td>
<td>70 161</td>
<td>94 347</td>
<td>3 333</td>
</tr>
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**alcohol accidents**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1975</strong></td>
<td>3 247</td>
<td>4 134</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1992</strong></td>
<td>10 646</td>
<td>15 320</td>
<td></td>
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**% of the total**

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<tr>
<td><strong>1975</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1992</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Most of the DWI offenders are relatively young. 28 % of them belong to the age group between 18 and 25, further 34 % are between 25 and 34 years old. In the groups of the 21 to 24- and the 25 to 34-year-olds, alcohol is especially often found to be involved, namely in 7 % of the cases. The recorded DWI offences decrease with growing age.
In 1992, about 75% of the DWI offenders involved in casualty accidents had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of greater than 110 mg/100 ml, which means that they were legally absolutely unable to drive. More than every fourth (27%) was even found to have a BAC of greater than 200 mg/100 ml. Small quantities of alcohol can already lead to functional deficits for younger drivers, whereas moderate drinking of older drivers apparently does not become obvious so quickly: in the age groups between 18 and 25 years, 16% of the drivers had a BAC of less than 80 mg/100 ml, but it were only 9% in the groups between 35 and 50.

Women are less frequently found to be DWI offenders. In 1992, only 7.2% of the 41,738 persons involved in accidents as a result of drinking were women, whereas their proportion in the total accident occurrence was more than a fourth part (28%).

RESULTS OF POLLS AND FIELD SAMPLES ON DWI

The following findings are the results of polls taken among the population at the turn of the year 1990/1991 and 1992/1993.

Before the German reunification, a legal BAC limit of 0 mg/100 ml was in force in the new federal states (former GDR). On 1 January 1993, the legal limit of 80 mg/100 ml, which had been in force until then only in the old federal states, was extended to the whole area of Germany. In the survey of 1992/1993, people were asked to give their opinion on this legal limit.

The first step was to find out to which degree the new limit in force since 1993 was generally known. 18% of the West Germans but only 12% of the East Germans admitted to ignore the legal BAC limit. Almost 80% of the East Germans gave the correct limit value, which is about 10 percentage points more than in the West. People in East Germany are thus better informed than in West Germany. 60% of all Germans advocated a BAC limit of up to 50 mg/100 ml.

Although the BAC limit of 80 mg/100 ml has been in force for 20 years in the former federal states, 55% of the West Germans interviewed pleaded for a limit of 50 mg/100 ml. In the new federal states, even 86% were in favour of this limit. In 1990, this proportion had been about 80%.

Accordingly, the new regulation was not really welcomed, as was shown by the 1992/1993 survey.

The BAC limit of 80 mg/100 ml is considered to be too high by more than half of the German population. Only 8% of the East Germans, and slightly more than a third part (33%) of the West Germans, having been used to it for years, agreed with this limit. People in the new federal states are especially discontented, 84% considering this limit as being too high.

Regional road block tests carried out during the last two years demonstrated that the legal limit of 80 mg/100 ml was exceeded by 3% of all drivers (Krüger). The law enforcement and sanction rate for DWI cases in Germany, however, is well-known: only 2% of all DWI offenders are detected and punished or convicted. Recent in-depth studies and motivational analysis came to the result that enforcement strategies and sanctioning systems should be integrated into a wider concept of long-term information campaigns and educational programmes (Kretschmer-Bäumel). In chapter 3, some examples are given in order to
illustrate the German approaches in the fields of general education and information of the public as well as individual DWI offender improvement by screening systems and rehabilitation programmes. Recent evaluation studies proved that, in Germany, the recidivism rate of about 45,000 programme participants annually can be effectively reduced by means of the well-established and integrated system of medico-psychological assessment, together with rehabilitation programmes for DWI offenders (Kroj, 1995; Stephan, 1988; Winkler, 1991).

**GENERAL PREVENTION AND INDIVIDUAL IMPROVEMENT**

The fact that DWI-related accidents have been considerably reduced in the course of the last twenty years may be explained by the framework conditions and complex strategies mentioned in the following:

**Information, Education and Driver Instruction**

For many years, the Federal Ministry of Transport and the corresponding Ministries on federal states level have launched education and information campaigns on the risks of drinking and driving. These campaigns were supported by measures carried out by the German Traffic Safety Council and its members. The Association against Drinking and Driving (Bund gegen Alkohol im Straßenverkehr), a non-governmental institution, is particularly active in this field. Numerous lectures are held by judges, public prosecutors, policemen, psychologists and forensic doctors in schools, driving schools and firms. Special attention is paid to education and information in the Federal Army, because the young conscripts as future car drivers or driving beginners are an important target group for these measures. For a long time, information for the general public has been provided in the form of big poster advertisements, especially on occasions such as New Year or Carnival. This broad information has been supported by films shown on television or in cinemas, illustrating the risks of drinking and driving. In many parts of Germany, free-of-charge driving services have been working for decades to ensure safe transport of people to and from drinking occasions or discos in rural regions - especially at night and at weekend.

The legal basis as well as the risks and consequences of drinking and driving are a central theme, illustrated by concrete examples, in traffic education, in driving school lessons and in driving license tests.

**Sanctions, Rehabilitation and Driver Improvement**

In 1994, 160,000 driving licenses were suspended as a result of drinking and driving in Germany. This is 6 % more than in the previous year. The representation of younger age groups is especially high: more than a third part (36 %) of all disqualifications from driving concerned road users between 21 and 30 years.

In the old federal states, the number of DWI offenses dropped steadily between 1980 and 1987; from 1988, however, it began to rise again. During the last two decades, the offer of rehabilitation and driver improvement measures for DWI offenders has become an important sector of the traffic safety work in the Federal Republic of Germany. A central
part of this extensive package of measures are the 150,000 medico-psychological tests of traffic offenders per year. These tests not only detect deficiencies but also serve as an instrument for counselling and assignment of rehabilitation and therapy measures for DWI offenders. These tasks are mainly assumed by about 400 especially trained traffic psychologists working in about 80 authorized medico-psychological test centers and in about 130 rehabilitation centers under the technical supervision of the federal states. Accompanying surveys carried out for many years have shown that the mentioned driver improvement and rehabilitation programmes are effective (Kroj, 1988, 1993; 1995; Stephan, 1988; Winkler, 1991). The quality of the measures is continually checked by the organizing institutions themselves and by the responsible supervising authorities.

In the framework of the probationary license system, obligatory courses for driving beginners detected for DWI have become an indispensable element. They include an initial screening conversation and 9 lessons divided into three small-group sessions directed by especially trained traffic psychologists. On account of quality ensuring, only specifically qualified traffic psychologists are allowed to lead these courses, in accordance with the German road licensing regulations (§ 12, 5 g StVZO).

CONCLUSION

Many reasons can lead to the success or failure of the mentioned rehabilitation programmes. It appears to be especially important that the driver improvement courses became an integral part of the system including legal sanctions and official inquiries about the driver aptitude, which precede the restitution of a suspended driving license and should be based on medico-psychological tests (Kroj, 1995).

First offenders tested before participating in an improvement course should be informed early about possible aptitude deficits so that they have the opportunity to take appropriate measures while the license is still suspended. General prevention based on judicial sanctioning of DWI offenses is thereby complemented by specific prevention. The suspension period can thus be put to better use and the measure is more likely to reach its aim of “driver improvement and risk prevention”.

The mandatory medico-psychological driver aptitude testing may give directions to multiple offenders with deficiencies strictly disqualifying them from driving as to if and how they could correct their deficiencies. One possible way is the participation in a rehabilitation course for DWI offenders. Due to the fact that the criteria for the participation in rehabilitation and driver improvement measures have been intensively tested in Germany and that the recidivism risk factors are taken into consideration, the degree of effectiveness of these courses is good. They are a useful element added to the spectrum of rehabilitation measures for DWI offenders (Kroj, 1995).

Sanctions and driving license suspension for DWI offenses are effective means of prevention. Specific prevention by means of rehabilitation programmes can be a useful complementary measure because DWI recidivism is not always to be explained by “character deficiencies” in the sense of moral deficiencies - it is often the result of chronic maladjustment and dangerous behavioural patterns in connection with alcohol and the DWI problem.
Alcoholics are not able to drive a vehicle. When a driver was once disqualified from driving as a result of DWI, a medical assertion of his regained driving aptitude must be based on the check that there is no alcohol abuse any longer.

REFERENCES


