Social Influences on Driving Under Psychoactive Substances

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Abstract
Social influence was examined in two field studies with young drivers at discotheques. In the first study, a half-standardized interview concerning attitudes toward driving under psychoactive substances (alcohol and illegal drugs) was conducted with N = 359 drivers. In the second study, N = 114 subjects were questioned in a social situation involving same and mixed sex couples. Compared to drivers under the influence of alcohol (DUI) drug-impaired drivers estimated the risk induced by drugs as lower. Moreover, drug-impaired drivers were convinced that drugs had positive effects on driving and believed in compensation strategies. Accordingly, these drivers did not wait as long as DUI drivers after consuming the drug, did not show any tendencies to restrict their DID trips to certain routes or times, and did not negotiate about which member of a group would have to drive and remain clear of drugs. These behaviours were supported by a lower expectation of sanctions, a stronger social acceptance and by the willingness of friends to also drive drug-impaired. The second study extended these results towards social interaction in couples. Although male drivers who had their girlfriend along were more likely to refrain from drug-impaired driving and avoided drug-impaired driving themselves, they did not resist to drive with a drug-impaired driver and thus reinforced the risky driving pattern of men. Social approval was confirmed in this study as the most dominant moral dimension in the decision to drive. These results show that for drug-impaired driving social influences play an even more important role than for DUI driving and that the pattern of influence is quite different. This has to be taken into account by driver training programs and other countermeasures. Most important, the reinforcement of drug-impaired driving by social influences has to be changed.