Unlicensed Driving Worldwide - The Scope of the Problem and Countermeasures

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The problem of unlicensed driving is a major road safety problem in countries around the world. A survey in the U.S. showed that 20 percent - one in every five - of all fatal crashes in the U.S. involve drivers who should never have been on the road in the first place due to the fact they were unlicensed. Estimates indicate that of the 56,688 drivers in fatal crashes in the U.S. in 1998, 23.7 percent were driving without a valid license. Of drivers considered to be at fault in crashes, the percentage increased to 35.4. If all unlicensed drivers stayed off the road, there would have been 13,435 fewer drivers in fatal crashes that year in the U.S. A study in Queensland, Australia showed that unlicensed drivers represented 7.9% of drivers involved in fatal crashes. The study results suggest that unlicensed drivers are more likely to engage in higher risk behaviors than licensed drivers. A 2006 study, conducted for MADD Canada, found that suspended drivers in Saskatchewan continued to drive with no license and that these drivers were at higher risk to be in an automobile crash. In Ontario, one in fourteen fatal crashes involved an unlicensed driver.

European countries have also found that unlicensed drivers pose a higher risk. For example, in the U.K., breath test results showed that 17% of disqualified drivers who were breath tested after an accident were positive compared with the national average for all post-crash tests of 3%. A 2004 U.K. Department for Transport report found that there are around a million unlicensed drivers on U.K. roads. The report notes that while unlicensed drivers account for less than one percent of total hours driven, unlicensed drivers are up to nine times more likely to have an accident than licensed drivers. Data also indicates that the problem is increasing in France and Belgium.

This paper will discuss the worldwide scope of the problem and potential solutions, including the impoundment of the vehicles of those who are driving illegally.

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