Criminal History and Recidivism of Impaired Drivers in Canada - A National Study

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This paper describes original research regarding criminal histories and recidivism of first-time drinking/driving offenders. The research period is from 1977 to 2006 and included all provinces and territories with the exception of Nunavut. Research provides us with data necessary to study long term trends in recidivism rates for impaired drivers as well as lengths and types of criminal careers.

Impaired driving offences include: (a) operation while impaired - impaired, (b) operation while impaired - exceeding 80 mgs, (c) failure or refusal to provide breath sample, (d) impaired driving causing bodily harm, and (e) impaired driving causing death.

The data source was a random sample of criminal records retrieved from Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Fingerprint Service (FPS) data bank. The RCMP data bank is national in scope and includes fingerprint records estimated at more than 6-million offenders/FPS records. The volumes of data are greater than any other data bank in America. The random sample included approximately 90,000 charges and 65,000 convictions for Criminal Code and other federal offences (e.g. drugs).

An offender was included in the study “cohort” if he/she had a first conviction for an impaired driving offence from 1977 to 2006. Offenders (n = 4,885) were tracked from the first impaired driving conviction; this conviction was used to measure three periods: criminal history period, index period and recidivism period. Of the 4,885 offenders who were included in the sample, 56% (n = 2,719) had prior convictions (e.g. criminal history period); 76% (n = 3,690) were convicted of a subsequent offence following the index period; of the offenders convicted of subsequent offences 36% (n = 1,738) had an impaired driving conviction as their first conviction in the recidivism period.

The most significant disposition type imposed in each time period was identified. Disposition types were ranked from least to most significant as follows: (a) absolute discharge, (b) conditional discharge, (c) suspended sentence, (d) fine, (e) community service, (f) probation, (g) conditional sentence, (h) incarceration.

Study conclusions include: Elapsed time between convictions, criminal histories, recidivism rates and ongoing research.

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