



The Road Safety Monitor **2007**

Drinking and Driving ●



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Drinking and Driving

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Executive Summary

- *The Road Safety Monitor (RSM)* is an annual public opinion survey by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) sponsored by Transport Canada, the Brewers Association of Canada and Toyota Canada Inc. The survey takes the pulse of the nation on key road safety issues by means of a telephone survey of a random, representative sample of Canadian drivers.
- The results of the *RSM* are released in a series of reports (available at: www.trafficinjuryresearch.com) – the present one focuses on drinking and driving.
- Progress in reducing the problem of drinking and driving appears to have halted. An estimated 1.84 million Canadians reported driving at least some time during the past year when they thought they were over the legal limit, representing an increase from the 1.7 million reported last year. Of greater concern, the percentage of drivers who reported driving in the last 12 months when they thought they were over the legal limit has also increased steadily from 5.6% in 2004 to 8.2% in 2007.
- Not surprisingly, Canadians are still very concerned about the problem: consistent with previous *RSM* reports, it was found that considerably more Canadians are very to extremely concerned about drinking and driving than about any other road safety issue. In 2007, 87% of Canadians express their concern about drinking and driving.
- There is evidence to suggest that higher levels of concern are an important factor in discouraging people from drinking and driving. Canadians who are less concerned about the problem are more likely to drive while they think they are over the legal limit than Canadians who more are concerned.
- Interestingly enough, it was found that the majority of drinking drivers are not confident that they could maintain control over their vehicle when they are driving within two hours of drinking. This – perhaps counterintuitive – finding may be suggestive of the attitude of drinking drivers who are less concerned about the issue.
- It was also found that drinking and driving is associated with being male, believing that the problem of drinking and driving is small, believing that drinking and driving does not necessarily increase the risk for a collision, a history of traffic tickets (excluding parking tickets), and lower levels of concern for road safety in general.
- Finally, this year's *RSM* also looked into public support for actions to control drinking and driving. Four measures garnered high levels of support among the public. These measures include:
 - ◆ mandatory use of ignition interlock devices for persons convicted of an impaired driving offence (83% agrees or strongly agrees with this measure);
 - ◆ tests of physical co-ordination in case the driver is suspected of being impaired by drugs or alcohol (80% agrees or strongly agrees);
 - ◆ immediate impoundment of the vehicles of drivers who fail a breath test (81% agrees or strongly agrees); and,
 - ◆ more police spot checks (70% agrees or strongly agrees).
- Considerably fewer Canadians (18%) support lowering the legal blood alcohol limit of .08%.



Introduction —●

The Road Safety Monitor (RSM) is an annual public opinion survey developed and conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) to take the pulse of the nation on key road safety issues. The survey examines:

- what Canadians see as priority road safety issues and how concerned they are about them;
- their views about how to deal with these problems;
- what they know and don't know about safe driving practices; and
- how they behave on the highways.

The *RSM* includes a core set of questions that are asked each year to provide information on trends in attitudes, opinions and behaviours. This is supplemented each year by a set of questions that probe more deeply into special, topical, and emerging issues.

This report describes the findings from the 2007 *RSM* regarding the issue of drinking and driving. Context is provided to discuss these results and compare them with the results of previous years.



Method

The seventh edition of the *RSM* contained 95 items designed to probe the knowledge, attitudes, and concerns of Canadians with respect to a range of road safety issues, and to obtain information on their driving practices. The survey required an average of 15 minutes to complete.

The survey was administered by telephone to a random sample of Canadian drivers who have driven in the past 30 days and have a valid driver's licence. The sample was stratified by province and weighted to avoid bias. Opinion Search Inc. fielded this survey in September, 2007. Among the 11,625 households contacted in which a person was asked to participate, 8,800 (76%) refused and 885 (7.6%) were not qualified.

A total of 1,238 drivers completed the interview. The data were analyzed taking account of the stratified and weighted sampling design (see StataCorp. 2007 for information about the modeling procedures), using both univariate and multivariate approaches. Based on a sample of this size, on average, the results can be considered accurate within 2.8%, 19 times out of 20.

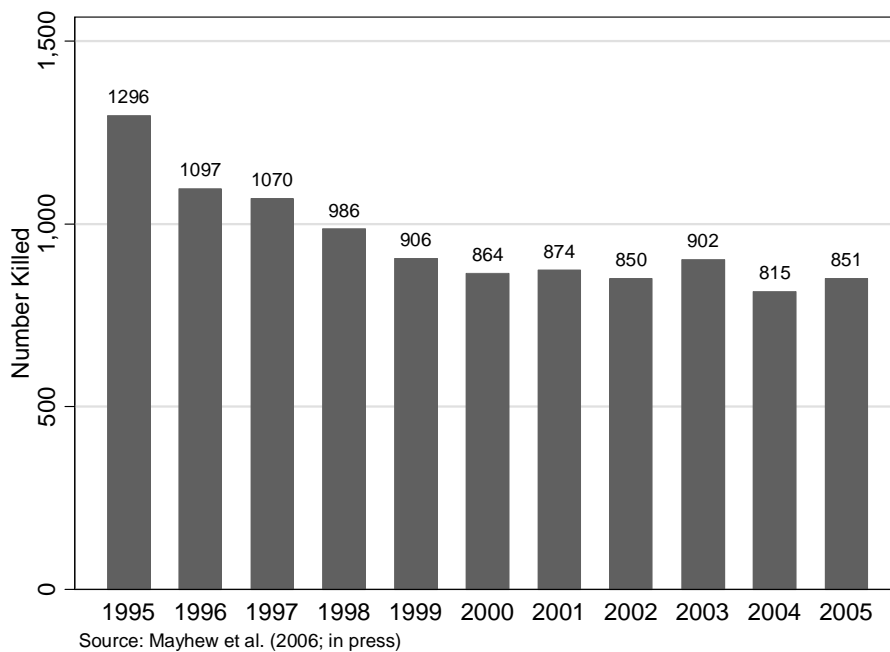


Drinking and Driving in Canada

How many Canadians die in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver?

Figure 1 shows the number of persons killed in a traffic crash in Canada involving a drinking driver, from 1995 through 2005. A general decreasing trend was evident from 1995 until 2002. However, the number of persons killed in on-road motor vehicle crashes increased in 2003 from 850 to 902, decreased to 815 in 2004, and then increased again in 2005 to 851 (Mayhew et al. in press).

Figure 1. Number¹ of Persons Killed in Crashes Involving a Drinking Driver²



These recent increases are somewhat less pronounced when the number of persons killed is standardized with available population data. Figures 2 and 3 show the number of

¹ Numbers are estimates based on the percent of fatalities for which information was available to determine alcohol use.

² These data are about collisions on public roadways involving principal vehicle types (i.e., automobiles, trucks/vans, motorcycles/mopeds, and tractor trailers).



persons killed in a traffic crash in Canada involving a drinking driver per 100,000 population and per 100,000 licensed drivers, respectively.³

Figure 2. Number of Persons Killed in Crashes Involving a Drinking Driver Per 100,000 Population

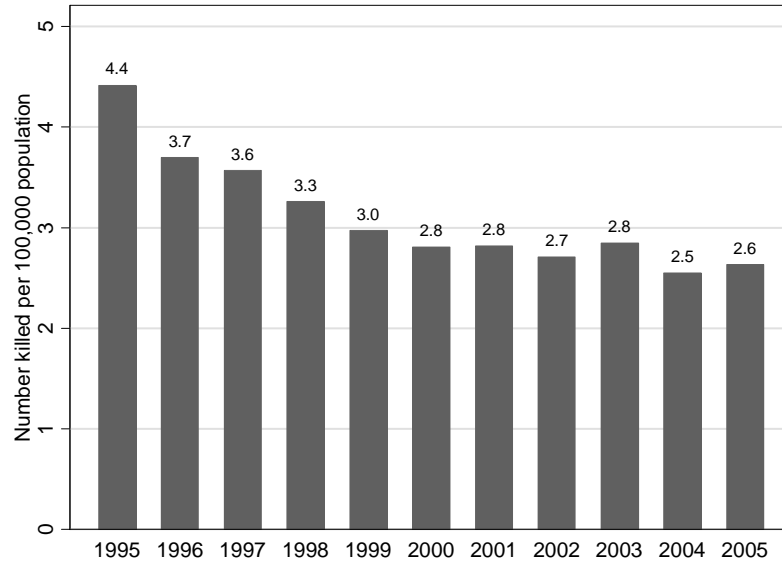
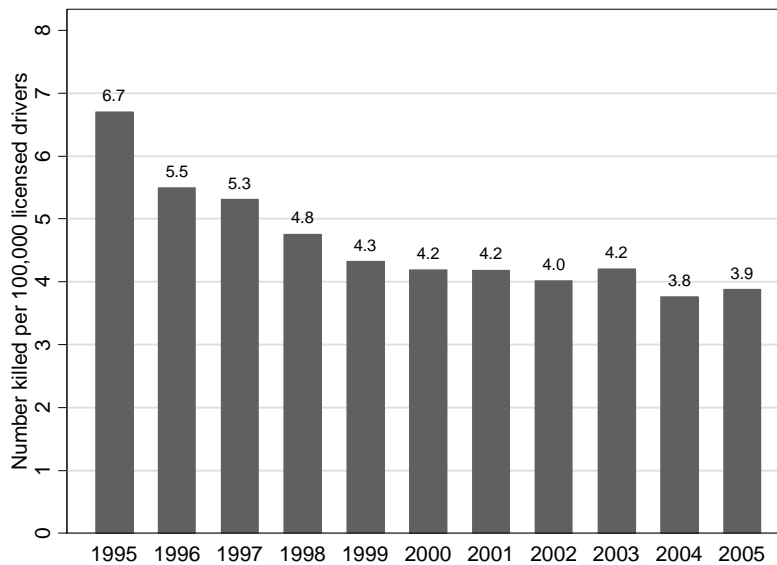


Figure 3. Number of Persons Killed in Crashes Involving a Drinking Driver Per 100,000 Licensed Drivers



³ Population data and information on the number of driver licenses was obtained from Transport Canada (2006).



It is evident that much of the decrease through to 2002 occurred in the 1990s. Since 2000 less progress has been made, and while it is too early to tell whether the number of persons killed in crashes involving a drinking driver is on the rise, the 2005 data do confirm that progress has halted. About 35% of all fatalities on Canadian roads involve people killed in a drinking-driving crash (Mayhew et al. 2006).

How many Canadians drive after drinking any amount of alcohol?

Some 17.6% of Canadians report they have driven at least once in the past thirty days within two hours of drinking any amount of alcohol. This percentage might appear high, but should be interpreted with caution, since 'any amount' does not only pertain to amounts above the legal limit but also to amounts below the legal limit, including amounts arising from having had just one drink – the latter would typically correspond to a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of about .02%. Nevertheless, it represents the proportion of drivers who admit that they have actually driven within two hours of drinking.

How many Canadians drive when they think they are over the legal limit?

Respondents were also asked on how many occasions in the past 12 months they had been driving when they thought they were probably over the legal limit – 8.2% of them answered they did so on at least one occasion. When extended to the general population of licensed drivers, this represents 1.84 million Canadians who reported driving when they thought they were over the legal limit at some time during the past year.⁴

8.2% of licensed Canadians (an estimated 1.84 million) report they have driven in the past 12 months when they thought they were over the legal limit.

If the reported number of times they did this is compared to the corresponding proportion of the total number of licensed drivers, it can be estimated that there were about 7.4 million trips in the past year during which the driver thought he/she was over the legal

⁴ This number is based on an estimated total of 22.38 million licensed drivers in 2007. This estimate was obtained by increasing the 2005 number of 21.937 million licensed drivers (source: Transport Canada 2006) with an anticipated growth of 1% per year.

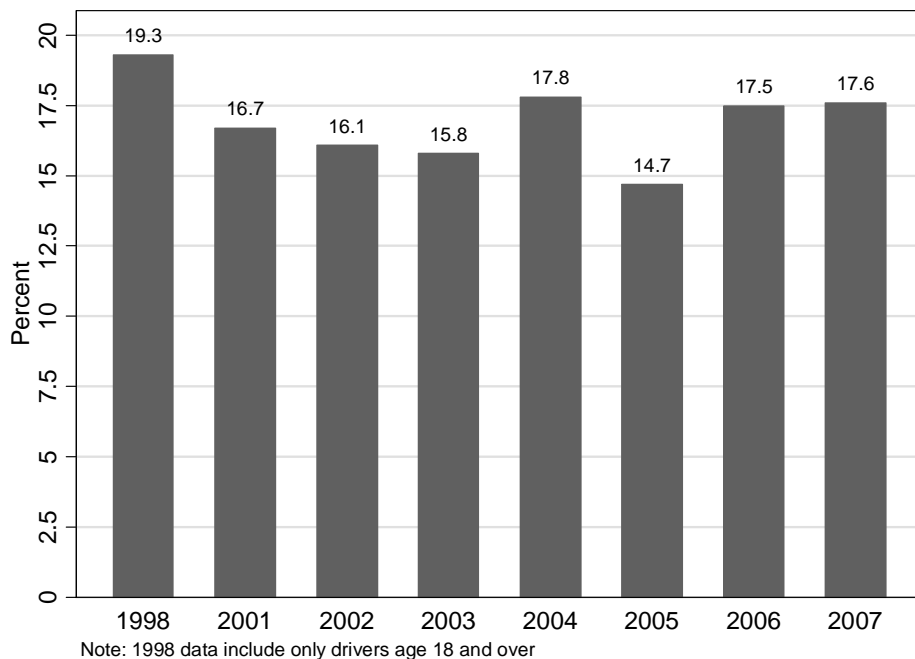


limit. However, the vast majority of these trips (89%) were accounted for by only 4.8% of the drivers.

Is the number of drinking drivers increasing or decreasing?

For the past seven years, the *RSM* has obtained data on the percentage of Canadians who report they had driven after consuming any amount of alcohol in the past 30 days. Figure 4 presents these findings and includes the findings from a 1998 survey, which served as a precursor to the *RSM*. As can be seen, there was a consistent decline in the percentage who reported driving after drinking any alcohol from 1998 to 2003, inclusive. The percentage increased in 2004, declined again in 2005, but increased once more in 2006 and in 2007.⁵ These data are consistent with previous figures and also suggest that progress in the fight against drinking and driving has halted (cf. Figures 1-3).

Figure 4. Percentage Who Report Driving Within Two Hours of Drinking Any Amount of Alcohol in Past 30 Days

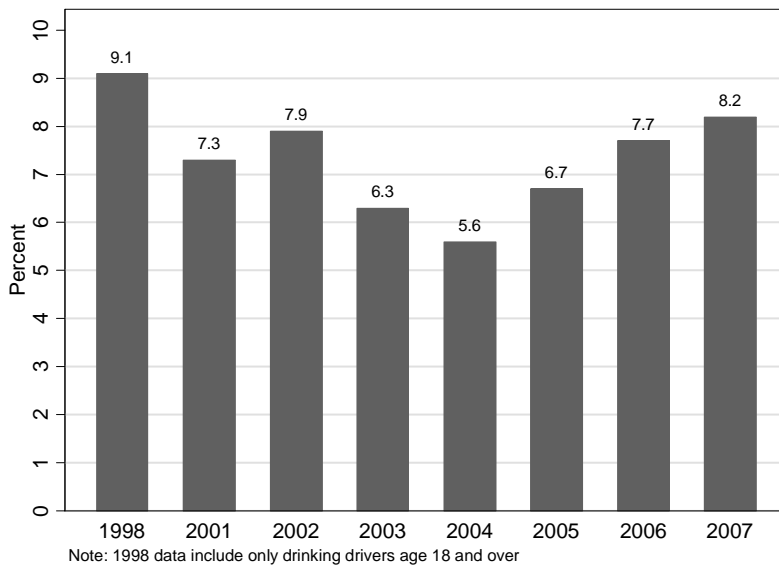


⁵ 1998 data were taken from Simpson et al. 1999; 2001-2005 data were taken from Beirness et al. 2005.



A somewhat different pattern emerges when considering the percentage of drivers who admitted to driving when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months (see Figure 5). A reasonably consistent and encouraging decline was noted up to 2004; however, in the last three years there have been three consecutive increases, from 5.6% in 2004, to 8.2% in 2007. These data suggest that the problem of drinking and driving in Canada is increasing.

Figure 5. Percentage Who Report Driving When They Thought They Were Over the Limit in Past 12 Months



In the last three years there have been three consecutive increases in the percentage of drivers who report driving when they thought they were over the legal limit, from 5.6% in 2004 to 8.2% in 2007.

Conclusion

The available data regarding the problem of drinking and driving in Canada suggest that progress has halted. While a general decreasing trend in the number of persons killed in crashes involving a drinking driver was evident from 1995 until 2002, this number increased in 2003 from 850 to 902, decreased to 815 in 2004, and then increased again in 2005 to 851. Up to 1.84 million Canadians reported driving when they thought they were over the legal limit at some time during the past year, which has increased over the 2006 figure of 1.7 million (see Vanlaar et al. 2006). More importantly, the percentage of drivers who reported driving when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months suggests that the problem is growing: since 2004, there has been a consistent increase from 5.6% to 8.2%.

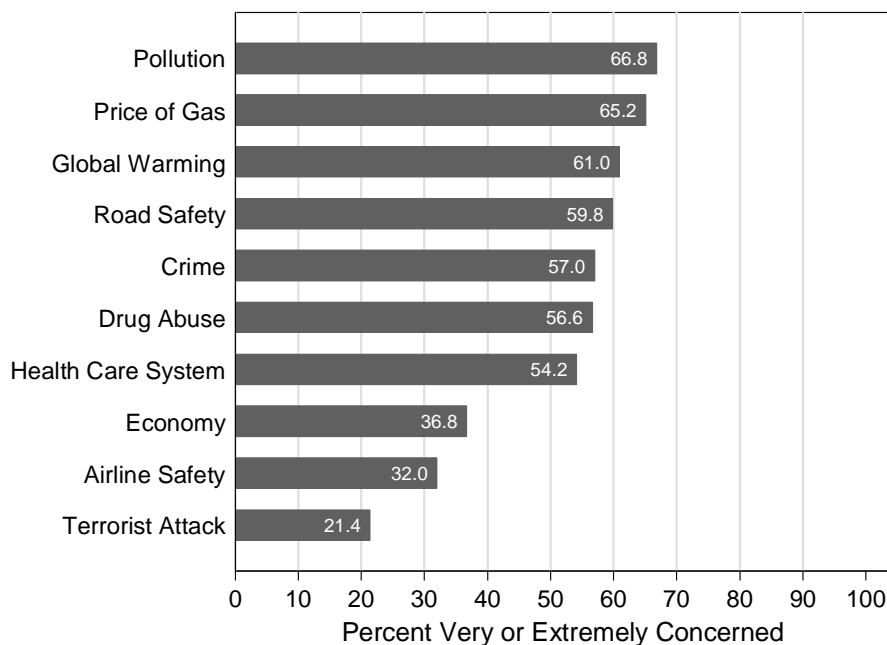


Concern About Road Safety and the Problem of Drinking and Driving

Where does the issue of road safety sit on the public agenda?

The *RSM* asked Canadians how concerned they are about a broad range of social issues. Figure 6 shows the percentage of respondents who said they were “very” to “extremely” concerned about these various social issues, rated on a scale from 1 (not at all concerned) to 6 (extremely concerned). As can be seen, a majority of Canadians (59.8%) are very to extremely concerned about road safety (i.e., they answered 5 or 6), behind pollution (66.8%), the price of gas at the pumps (65.2%), and global warming (61%). Respondents were more concerned about road safety than about crime (57%), drug abuse (56.6%), the state of the health care system (54.2%), the economy (36.8%), airline safety (32%), or the threat of a terrorist attack (21.4%).

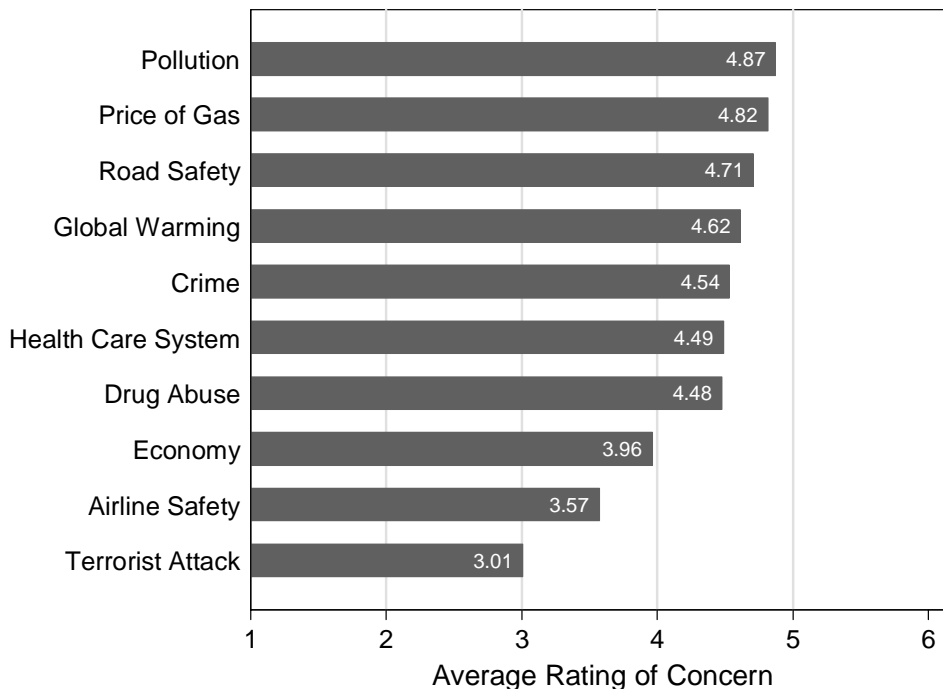
Figure 6. Percentage Very or Extremely Concerned About Various Social Issues



It warrants mentioning that not all the differences between these social issues are significant. Further analysis revealed that a distinction can be made between three groups. First, the percent of Canadians who are very or extremely concerned about pollution is significantly higher than road safety and forms the first group. The second group comprises the issues 'price of gas', 'global warming', 'road safety', 'crime', 'drug abuse', and 'the health care system'. The percent of Canadians who are very or extremely concerned about each of these issues is more or less the same. Finally, significantly fewer Canadians are concerned about the economy, airline safety and terrorist attacks – together they are the last group. Another study, carried out in 2007, found a comparable pattern and concluded that “the safety of road travel is seen [by the public] as a mid-level priority, with 54 per cent expressing concern about this issue.” (EKOS Research Associates Inc. 2007: p. iii).

Looking at the average rating of concern for the various social issues, the general pattern of results is only somewhat different (see Figure 7). On average, road safety was ranked third in terms of concern instead of fourth, but the overall pattern that was found in Figure 6 remains the same.

Figure 7. Average rating of Concern for Various Social Issues

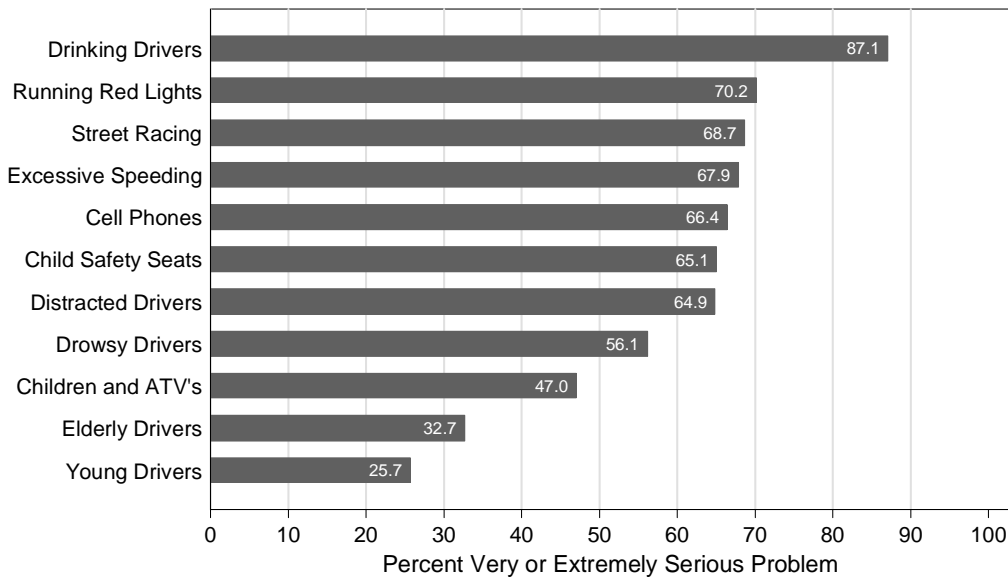


Is drinking and driving still a major road safety issue for Canadians?

The *RSM* also contained a series of specific road safety issues and respondents were asked how serious they perceive those issues to be, ranging from 1 (not a problem at all) to 6 (an extremely serious problem). As can be seen in Figure 8, of all the road safety issues, drinking drivers were rated as a very or extremely serious problem (5 or 6 out of 6) by 87.1% of respondents – significantly higher than any other road safety issue. The remaining road safety issues rated as very to extremely serious problems were as follows: 70.2% for running red lights, 68.7% for street racing, 67.9% for excessive speeding, 66.4% for the use of (hand-held or hands-free) cell phones while driving, 65.1% for children being improperly secured in safety seats, 64.9% for distracted drivers, 56.1% for drowsy or fatigued drivers, 47% for children driving all-terrain vehicles (ATV's), 32.7% for elderly drivers, and 25.7% for young drivers.

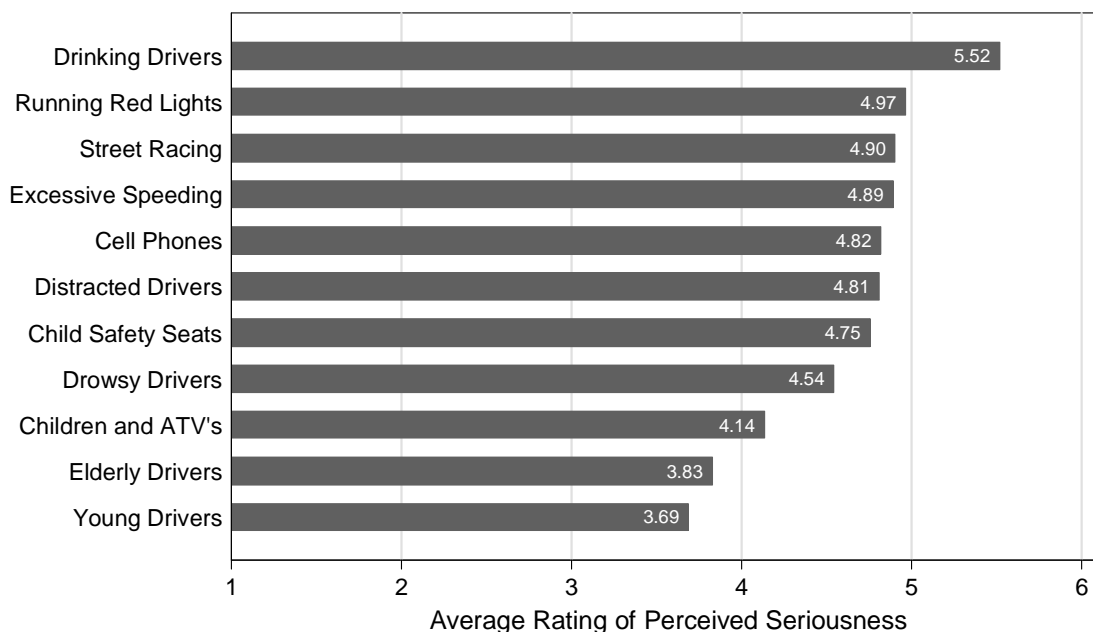
Canadians are more concerned about drinking and driving than about any other road safety issue.

Figure 8. Percentage Very or Extremely Concerned About Various Road Safety Issues



In terms of the average rating of the perceived seriousness of road safety issues, drinking and driving is again at the top of the list: on average, respondents rated drinking drivers at 5.52 out of a possible score of 6 regarding the perceived seriousness of the issue (see Figure 9). This was followed by running red lights (4.97), street racing (4.9), excessive speeding (4.89), hand-held or hands-free cell phone use (4.82), distracted drivers (4.81), children not properly secured in child safety seats (4.75), drowsy or fatigued drivers (4.54), children driving ATV's (4.14), elderly drivers (3.83), and young drivers (3.69).

Figure 9. Average Rating of Perceived Seriousness of Various Road Safety Issues



Taken together, these results suggest that, relative to other societal issues, road safety is a major concern among Canadians, ranking high on the public agenda; and, that drinking and driving is at the top of the list of road safety issues.



Is there a relationship between concern about drinking and driving and self-reported drinking-driving behaviour?

The level of concern a person has about problem behaviours such as drinking and driving is influenced by a variety of factors. Some individuals will feel more concern according to how big they perceive the problem to be – in terms of how many people they believe to be drinking and driving –, while others will feel greater concern based on their perceptions of how risky the behaviour is. The results of this *RSM* allowed investigating whether a relationship exists between concern about drinking and driving and self-reported drinking-driving behaviour using information obtained regarding reasons for concern.

It was found that people who think the problem of drinking and driving is bigger are less likely to report they drive after drinking, compared to those who think the problem is smaller. Also, people who believe it is more likely for drinking drivers to cause a collision are less likely to report drinking-driving behaviour. Finally, it was found that people who are more concerned about road safety in general (rather than drinking and driving) are less likely to report they drive after drinking.

These findings correspond to results from the previous *RSM* report on drinking and driving (see Vanlaar et al. 2006) in which it was found that Canadians who are less concerned about the problem of drinking and driving are more likely to report driving while they thought they were over the legal limit than Canadians who are more concerned about the issue (21.2% compared to 7.6%).

Canadians who are less concerned about the problem of drinking and driving are more likely to report driving while they thought they were over the legal limit than Canadians who are more concerned about the issue.



Profile of Drinking Drivers —●

The subsample of drinking drivers in this study was not large enough to examine different types of drinking drivers. It was possible, however, to discern distinct differences between those who report driving after drinking and those who do not.

In order to ascertain what factors differentiate drinking drivers from non-drinking drivers, respondents were asked a series of questions pertaining to their drinking and driving behaviour. Specifically, they were asked:

- whether or not they had driven within 2 hours of drinking any alcohol in the past 30 days;
- whether or not they had driven when they thought they were probably over the legal limit in the past 12 months; and,
- in general terms, how often they drink and drive, on a scale of 1 (never) to 6 (very often).

Relationships between their answers to these questions and other information such as their gender and age were investigated.

What factors are associated with driving within two hours of drinking any alcohol?

When participants were identified as either having driven within 2 hours after drinking any alcohol in the past month or not, a number of factors emerged as significant individual predictors of drinking and driving:

- male drivers are more likely to drink and drive than female drivers;
- the belief that the problem of drinking and driving is smaller – those drivers who believe the problem of drinking and driving is smaller, are more likely to drive after drinking, compared to those who believe the problem is bigger;
- the belief that drinking drivers are less likely to cause a collision – those drivers who believe it is less likely for drinking drivers to cause a collision, are more at risk for driving after drinking than those who believe it is more likely for drinking drivers to cause a collision;



- an increased number of traffic tickets received within the past year (excluding parking tickets) – more tickets are associated with drinking and driving; and,
- a decreased level of concern about road safety in general – those drivers who are less concerned about road safety are more likely to drink and drive than those who are more concerned.

What factors are associated with driving over the legal limit?

Respondents were also identified according to whether or not they had driven when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past year. This behaviour was associated with:

- an increased number of traffic tickets received in the past year (excluding parking tickets); and,
- lower levels of concern for road safety in general.

What factors are associated with drinking and driving in general?

Finally, respondents were grouped in response to whether or not they ever reported drinking and driving in general (i.e., those who answered 1 – never – versus those who answered 2 to 6 – very often). Drinking and driving in general was associated with:

- an increased number of traffic tickets received in the past year (excluding parking tickets);
- being male; and,
- a decreased perception of the likelihood for drinking drivers to cause a collision.

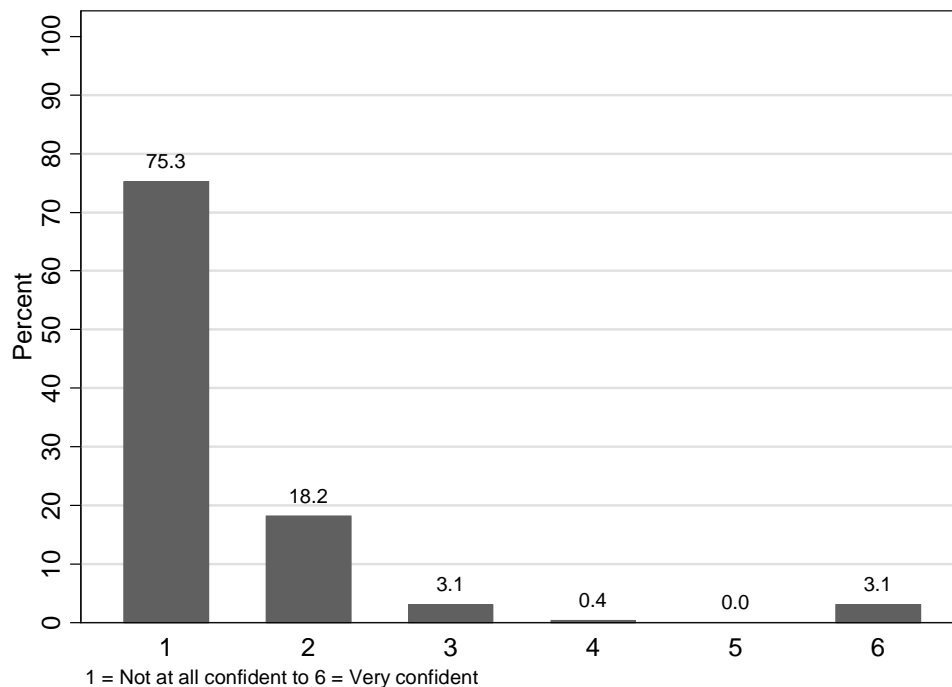
How confident are drinking drivers behind the wheel?

Another question new to the *RSM* this year asked respondents who admitted they had driven within 2 hours of drinking any alcohol in the past 30 days how confident they were that they could maintain control of their vehicle on a scale of 1 (not at all confident) to 6 (very confident).



As can be seen in Figure 10, the majority stated they were not confident that they could maintain control of their vehicle: 96.5% answered one – not at all confident – two or three. Only 3.5% reported they were confident: 3.1% answered six – very confident – and 0.4% answered four on this scale. A comparable pattern emerges when looking only at the answers of those who also reported driving when they thought they were over the legal limit (95.1% answered one, two or three and 4.9% answered four, five or six).

Figure 10. Percent of Levels of Confidence About Maintaining Control of Vehicle When Driving Within 2 Hours After Drinking



This paradoxical result may seem counterintuitive as one would expect that a feeling of not being in control would lead to avoiding the behaviour that is believed to be the cause of the lack of control. However, this finding may be indicative of the lower level of concern reported by drinking drivers: while they may realize they are less in control of their vehicle they may not understand that their risk of having a collision increases when they are drinking and driving (see previous paragraph); or, they may realize they are less in control but they do not attribute that lack of control to their drinking and driving behaviour.



Conclusion

These results suggest that drinking and driving is associated with being male, believing that the problem of drinking and driving is small, believing that drinking and driving does not necessarily increase the risk for a collision, a history of traffic tickets (excluding parking tickets), and lower levels of concern for road safety in general.

The results also suggest that drinking drivers are generally not confident that they could maintain control of their vehicle, probably because they may not fully understand the risks of a collision associated with this behaviour.



Public Support for Actions to Control Drinking and Driving

Canadians were also asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the use of various measures for dealing with the problem of drinking and driving. They could answer using a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Using this information, it was determined whether levels of support differ according to subgroups of drivers. In particular, differences between levels of support between those who are very concerned about the problem compared to those who are less concerned were investigated.

Level of Support for Various Measures

Figure 11 shows the level of support for a variety of actions against drinking and driving. These actions include:

- mandatory use of ignition interlock devices for persons convicted of an impaired driving offence;
- tests of physical co-ordination in case the driver is suspected of being impaired by drugs or alcohol;
- immediate impoundment of the vehicles of drivers who fail a breath test;
- more police spot checks; and,
- lowering the legal limit .⁶

As can be seen in Figure 11, 82.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it should be mandatory for convicted impaired drivers to have an ignition interlock system; 80.9% agreed or strongly agreed that that police should immediately impound the vehicles of drivers who fail an alcohol breath test; over four-fifths (80.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that drivers should be required to submit to tests of physical co-

⁶ Note that respondents who mildly agree (i.e., those who answered 4 on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 6 means strongly agree) have been excluded in the bar chart in Figure 11; and, that the result for lowering the legal limit is based on those who answered they thought the limit should be lowered when given the options 'lowering the limit' or 'increasing the limit'.

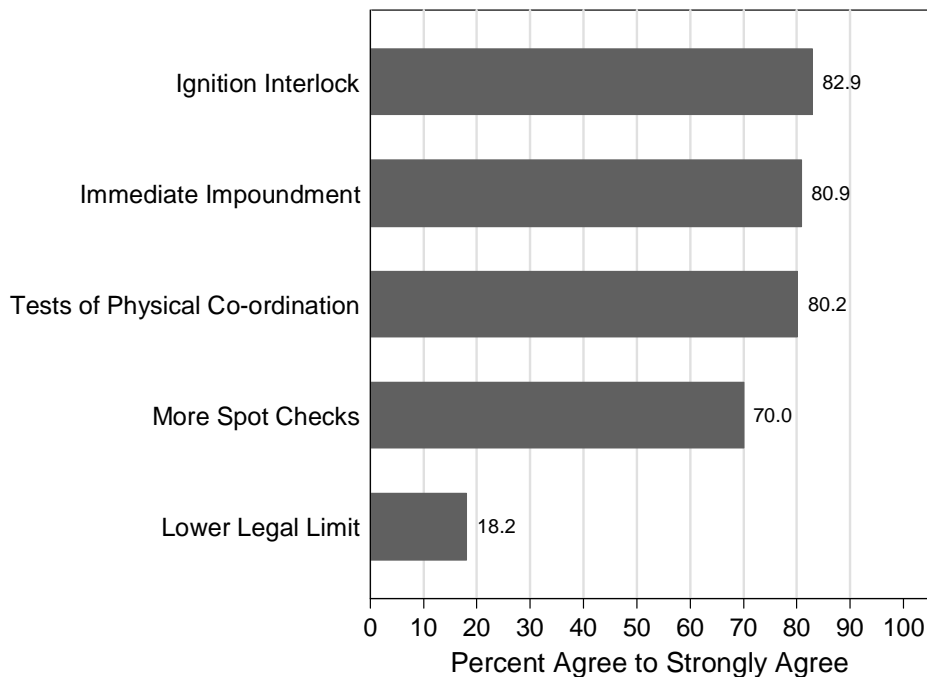


ordination if suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs; 70% agreed or strongly agreed that there should be more police spot checks for impaired drivers; and only 18.2% agreed that the current legal limit of .08% should be lowered.

Note that respondents were simply asked whether or not they felt the .08% limit was appropriate, and, if not, whether they thought it should be lowered or raised. Among all respondents, the majority (77%) felt that the legal limit of .08% is appropriate. Among those who did not feel it is an appropriate limit (the remaining 23%), more than four fifths believe that it should be lowered. When recalculating the percent of respondents who said the limit should be lowered out of the total sample of respondents, the resulting percentage is 18.2%.

While the majority of Canadians endorse a variety of possible actions against drinking and driving, lowering the legal limit garnered the lowest level of support.

Figure 11. Percentage Who Agree or Strongly Agree with Actions Against Drinking and Driving



Is there a relationship between concern about drinking and driving and support for measures to control it?

Similar to the 2006 *RSM* results, it was found that Canadians who are more concerned about the problem of drinking and driving are more supportive of a variety of actions to prevent drinking and driving. Individuals who are concerned about drinking and driving are more likely to endorse mandatory use of ignition interlock devices for persons convicted of an impaired driving offence, tests of physical co-ordination in case the driver is suspected of being impaired by drugs or alcohol and more police spot checks.

Although the data suggest that being concerned also increases the likelihood that people will endorse immediate impoundment of the vehicles of drivers who fail a breath test, the sample was not large enough to confirm this. Conversely, the data do not suggest that being more concerned about drinking and driving implies a person will endorse lowering the legal limit.



Summary and Conclusions —●

Progress in reducing the problem of drinking and driving in Canada appears to have halted. An estimated 1.84 million Canadians reported driving at least some time during the past year when they thought they were over the legal limit, representing an increase from the 2006 figure of 1.7 million. Of greater concern, the percentage of drivers who reported driving in the last 12 months when they thought they were over the legal limit has also increased steadily from 5.6% in 2004 to 8.2% in 2007.

Not surprisingly, Canadians are still very concerned about the problem: ever since the first *RSM* took place, it was found that considerably more Canadians are very to extremely concerned about drinking and driving than about any other road safety issue. In 2007, 87% of Canadians express their concern about drinking and driving, compared to 70% who are concerned about running red lights, which is ranked second. Relative to other societal issues, only pollution seems to preoccupy Canadians more than road safety in general, while significantly fewer Canadians are concerned about the economy, airline safety and terrorist attacks. Canadians are equally concerned about road safety as they are about such issues as the price of gas, global warming, crime, drug abuse, and the health care system.

There is evidence to suggest that higher levels of concern are an important factor in discouraging people from drinking and driving. These findings corroborate results from the previous year showing that Canadians who are less concerned about the problem are more likely to drive while they think they are over the legal limit than Canadians who are more concerned. The challenge is to identify ways to instill such feelings of concern in the minds of drinking drivers.

Possible avenues to achieve this include making drinking drivers understand how alcohol affects their behaviour and places them at an increased risk of collision. It was found that the majority of drinking drivers are not confident that they could maintain control over their vehicle when they are driving within two hours of drinking. Such a – perhaps counterintuitive – finding may be indicative of the attitude of drinking drivers who are less concerned about the issue: despite realizing they are less in control of their



vehicle when driving within two hours of drinking, they do not necessarily understand that their risk for a collision increases because of it, or they do not necessarily attribute that lack of control to their drinking and driving behaviour.

While the subsample of drinking drivers in this study was not large enough to examine different kinds of drinking drivers, it was possible to discern distinct differences between those who report driving after drinking and those who do not. It was found that drinking and driving is associated with being male, believing that the problem of drinking and driving is small, believing that drinking and driving does not necessarily increase the risk for a collision, a history of traffic tickets (excluding parking tickets), and lower levels of concern for road safety in general.

Finally, this year's *RSM* also looked into public support for actions to control drinking and driving. Four measures garnered high levels of support among the public. These measures include:

- mandatory use of ignition interlock devices for persons convicted of an impaired driving offence (83% agrees or strongly agrees with this measure);
- tests of physical co-ordination in case the driver is suspected of being impaired by drugs or alcohol (80% agrees or strongly agrees);
- immediate impoundment of the vehicles of drivers who fail a breath test (81% agrees or strongly agrees); and,
- more police spot checks (70% agrees or strongly agrees).

Considerably fewer Canadians support lowering the legal limit. The majority (77%) think the legal limit of .08% is appropriate. Among those who do not think it is an appropriate limit (the remaining 23%), about four fifths believe that it should be lowered. When comparing respondents who think the legal limit should be lowered to the entire sample, the resulting percentage of Canadians who endorse lowering the legal limit is only 18.2%.



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