

CONVEYING TRAFFIC SAFETY MESSAGES TO ND TEENS



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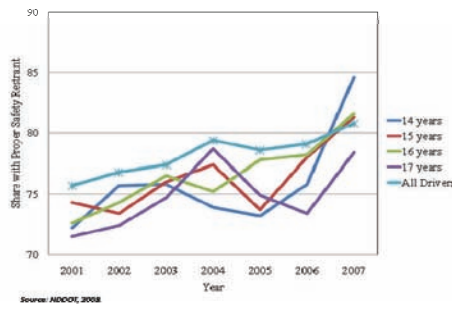
Safe Communities coalitions exist to prevent injury and because many injuries are preventable, Safe Communities focus their resources and tools on education and outreach methods for decreasing injuries and deaths that are prevalent in their geographic location. A major focus area for Safe Communities is traffic crashes and determining how to prevent them. The North Dakota Northern Valley Safe Communities and Region III Safe Communities see opportunities for improving traffic safety with rural teenager.

While there are various issues that could be addressed when promoting traffic safety to teenagers, the safe communities' coordinators from the Northern Valley and Region III focused on two prominent areas of concern. The organizations initiated a 2008 project in several rural North Dakota communities. To convey traffic safety messages to teenagers the message focused specifically on seat belt use and impaired driving. North Dakota crash data emphasizes the need to focus efforts on these two traffic safety issues.

SEAT BELTS

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration indicates teenagers have the highest crash rate among people who are of driving age (2006). In 2007, 11 teen drivers were killed on ND roads. Of those killed, 5 were not wearing seatbelts. These 5 teenagers' deaths all may have been prevented simply by use of a seat belt and while seatbelt usage for teenagers does seem to trend upwards over the past 6 years, it has remained lower than that of drivers overall.

Driver Seat Belt Usage Rates for All Crashes by Age



The graph shows number of alcohol-related crashes in 2006 for each age group (ND Crash Summary) as well as the crash-to-driver ratio. While the age group 21-34 includes the greatest number of alcohol-related crashes, when compared to drivers the same age, the 14-20 group is the highest.

PROJECT GOAL

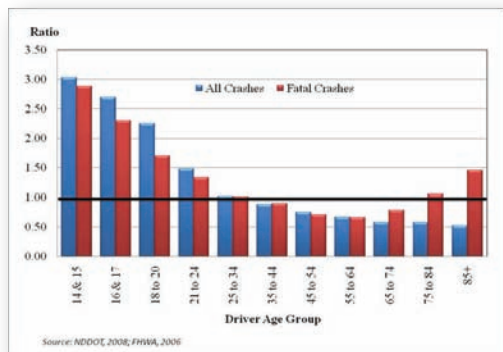
The goal of this project was to coordinate with Grand Forks and Devil's Lake Safe Communities Coalitions to hold focus group discussions to better understand attitudes and perceptions regarding traffic safety messages targeting teens.

RESEARCH PROBLEM Young drivers are often targeted with numerous traffic safety campaigns, the need for innovative methods is increasing. With the development and use of new technologies the focus group method offers a means to gather information about what teenagers believe will be most effective.

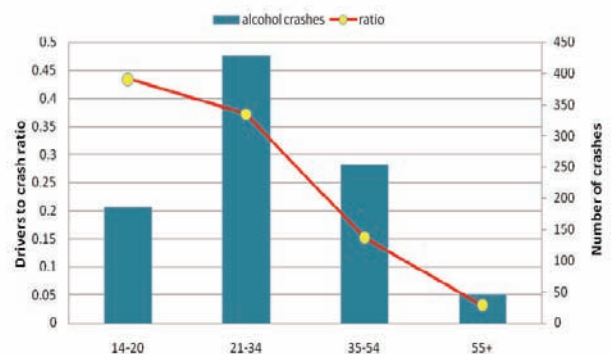
ALCOHOL

Impaired driving is also a critical traffic safety concern in North Dakota. Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming have the highest proportion of drivers who have been drinking in fatal traffic accidents when comparing all U.S. states. While the national average is 21 percent, North Dakota was at 42 percent (FARS 2005).

Crash Ratios by Driver Age Group, 2001 to 2007



Age Group Comparison in Alcohol-Related Crashes, 2006



MESSAGE AND DELIVERY RECOMMENDATION FROM TEENS:

Don't preach, but use facts.

Prerecorded radio messages may not be effective. Instead DJs could try talking about it live on the air.

Use factual messages about impaired driving and seat belt use.

Teens need messages about other risky behaviors (speeding, driving distractions, etc.).

Use local coroner or paramedic to tell real stories.

Use multiple mechanisms: TV, radio, billboards, movies and news.

Parents should play a bigger role in communicating risky driving behavior and its' consequences.

THE FOCUS GROUPS

Three focus groups were conducted in May of 2008. Each focus group took place at the high school and included participants of ages 14 to 18 who were recruited to participate in an hour-long focus group.

RESULTS The focus groups provided valuable insight into the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of rural North Dakota teens in regards to seat belt use and impaired driving.

SEAT BELT THEMES The seat belt discussions provided key points that were consistent in the three high school groups.

Most of the students did agree that using a seat belt is a safety issue. However, students think they are invincible. It seems they need to be convinced that traffic crashes and resulting injuries and death are real and can happen. Again, they understand the safety aspect, but need to be convinced it can affect them personally. "Shock" tactics or use of real stories about car crash tragedies may be effective for promoting seat belt use.

Overall, teens need information on the dangers of traffic crashes, the reality of the occurrences in the state, and the importance of seatbelt use. They all seemed to agree that good role models are needed to convey such information. Also – parents are an important part of influencing seatbelt use for their kids and making it a habit.

IMPAIRED DRIVING THEMES

Discussions about why teens drink and drive revolved around a few central ideas. A key concept points toward the drinking "norm" portrayed in rural North Dakota. Drinking and driving is viewed almost as a cultural activity that communities expect or simply put up with. Another theme is there is "nothing else to do".

To curb drinking and driving, teens need to know that it is illegal and will not be tolerated. More visible police would be one method of decreasing drinking and driving behaviors according to these focus group discussions. Also, as indicated in the seatbelt section, students implied that teenagers need good, strong role models and consistent parenting that stresses a no tolerance rule for drinking and driving.

Methods for conveying messages are parallel to those discussed for seatbelt use. Teens need to be convinced that crashes and resulting tragedies are a real consequence of drinking and driving. They need to know they are not invincible. Teens want simple, basic messages that stress the scary results of drinking and driving crashes.

OVERALL IMPORTANT NOTES

Some of the most critical information discussed in the focus groups about how to motivate teens to belt up is listed below.

-  More Cops and Enforcement
-  Parental Involvement and Examples
-  Role models
-  Education about seatbelt/DUI laws and penalties is needed
-  Teach kids when young – instill safe habits
-  Getting teens involved in sports or other extracurricular activities is an important to impact their behavior
-  Scare tactics and real life stories would be helpful

CONCLUSION

The information gathered from the high school focus groups was valuable and enlightening. One thing that became evident is there is no easy answer. Both traffic safety issues, seat belt use and impaired driving, seem simple, yet are complicated from the viewpoint of rural North Dakota teens. There is room for improvement and the Safe Communities Coalitions are trying to make positive changes. The focus groups provided a roadmap of opportunities that will play a role in taking action to decrease injuries and death in rural