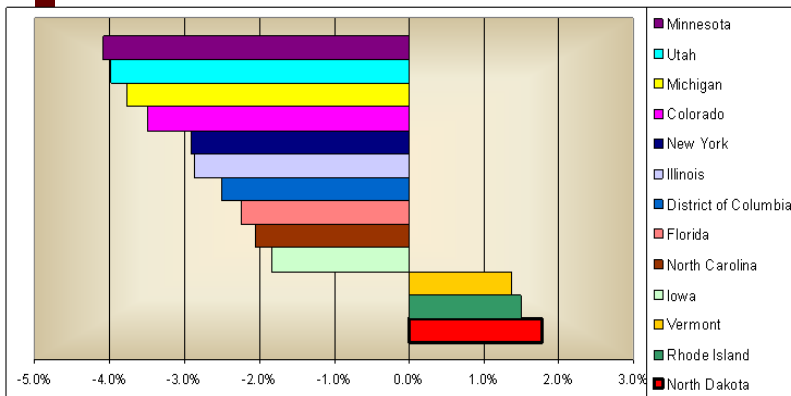


Addressing ND Motor Vehicle Crashes: Young Male Drivers

Each year vehicle crashes are the cause of numerous injuries and death. In 2006, motor vehicle crashes caused 42,642 deaths in the United States (FARS query, 2008). Some states have been making better

North Dakota ranks 51 among the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The North Dakota Department of Transportation's (NDDOT) Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) has a vision to make positive changes.



Traffic Fatality Trends: Top & Bottom States, Average Yearly Change 1994-2006 in per 100 M vehicle miles traveled

progress than others in reducing those numbers. In the graph above, the top 10 states are those with **negative bars, meaning the state's fatality rates, on average, decreased from 1994 to 2006.** The bottom 3 states, with trend lines shown in the positive direction, have seen increased rates of traffic fatalities from 1994 to 2006. Minnesota ranks the best at number one while

North Dakota crash data reveals concerns in the areas of driving under the influence as well as seat belt use. In 2006, alcohol, drugs, and/or medication was the second leading contributing factor in North Dakota fatal crashes (ND Crash Summary, 2006). Seat belt use also plays a significant role in saving lives. Of the fatalities in 2007, 72 percent were unbelted (ND crash data).

Male drivers ages 18 to 34 have a high incidence of crash occurrences in our ND. Although males make up half of the driving population, in 2005 they made up a greater proportion (57 percent) of people involved in all crashes.

To address the male driver issue, this project obtained as much information as possible regarding risky driving behaviors in male drivers ages 21 to 34. The results will enable the OTS to formulate customized programs that educate drivers and impact behaviors to improve traffic safety and reduce vehicle crashes, injuries, and deaths.

The Study

The Office of Traffic Safety and the Rural Transportation Safety and Security Center joined efforts on a research project to address two traffic safety issues that targeted a high risk driving group: impaired driving and seat belt use. The specific research questions included:

- What are the specific drinking behaviors, beliefs and attitudes of young, male ND drivers regarding driving with an illegal blood alcohol limit?
- What contributes to impaired driving in this target group of drivers?
- How do we reduce or stop impaired driving in this target group of drivers?
- What are the behaviors, beliefs and attitudes of young, male drivers in North Dakota regarding use of seat belts?
- What contributes to or inhibits seat belt use in this group of people?
- How do we increase seat belt use in this target group of drivers?

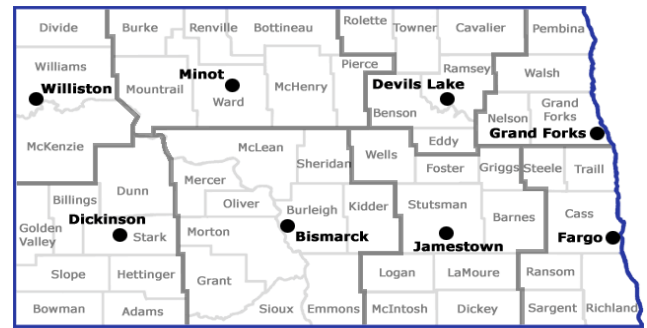
To obtain detailed information, focus groups were conducted throughout North Dakota with the targeted group of drivers, males ages 21 to 34. The thoughtful, free-flowing discussion among participants allowed for better understanding of a specific topic. An advantage of this method is the possibility of uncovering attitudes and opinions that are difficult to achieve with a simple survey. Participants were chosen based on availability and accessibility, and thus not representative of the larger population.

A total of 13 focus groups (92 total participants) were conducted to collect information on the drivers' knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding seat belt use as well as driving under the influence of alcohol. Participants were from each of the eight North Dakota Human Service Regions (as shown in the illustration on page 2). The focus groups were held between Oct. 1 and Dec. 10, 2007.

The Study (Continued)

A pre-discussion questionnaire collected demographic information as well as beliefs regarding traffic safety issues. The questionnaire also prompted participants to rank various deterrents of impaired driving and seatbelt nonuse in terms of effectiveness. These rankings are discussed in the results section.

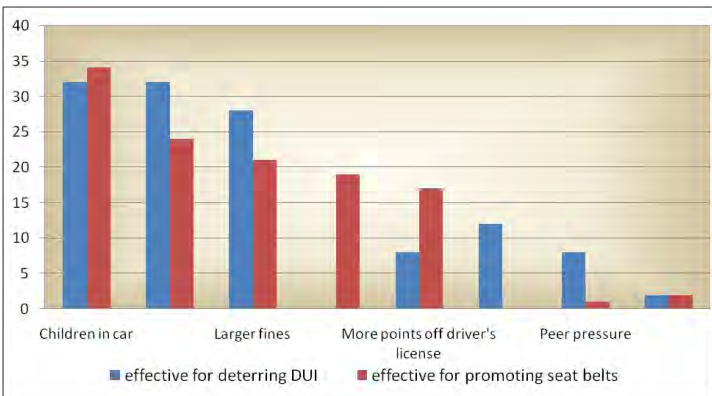
A discussion guide used included outline questions or topic-openers that focused on seat belt use and impaired driving to promote and focus discussion.



Results

Questionnaire Results

Participants were asked if stricter penalties would be effective deterrents against impaired driving and seatbelt nonuse. A majority of respondents answered "yes" to both questions. Participants were also asked to rank options from one to seven, with one being most effective, in improving seat belt use and decreasing drinking and driving among young male drivers (see graph below). In both rankings, "law enforcement," "larger fines," and "children in car" were reported as the most effective options; "media coverage" and "peer pressure" were reported as least effective.



Discussion Results

Several themes emerged from the focus group discussion regarding seat belt use. Participants increased fines would be most likely to encourage seat belt use. Implementing stricter policies may prove to be helpful, but is a legislative issue outside the influence of the ND Office of Traffic Safety. However, an effective strategy may include using the current seat belt law as a factual media push.

Similarly, participants discussed the perceived leniency of North Dakota DUI laws and how increasing penalties would deter drinking and driving. Many focus groups also discussed that an increased presence of readily available transportation home from a drinking establishment would likely decrease instances of drinking

References

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Promoting Seat Belt Use, Themes for Young Males:

- Presence of kids
- Adverse driving conditions
- More/stricter law enforcement
- Stricter penalties
- Use of "shock" tactics—real stories
- Promote current seat belt law in media campaign

Deterring Impaired Driving, Themes for Young Males:

- Promote strong parenting, family values and education
- More/stricter law enforcement
- Stricter penalties
- Promote DUI policies at the workplace
- Readily available transportation home from the bar

and driving. Many participants expressed concerns with the availability of existing taxi services, but said they would use such transportation if it were available and convenient. Additionally, groups felt that raised awareness regarding employer policies about drinking and driving as well as the legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit may prove helpful.

Interestingly, despite questionnaire data indicating the lack of effectiveness of media campaigns, groups indicated that "scare tactics" and other public information campaigns may be effective in increasing seat belt use and reducing drunk driving. Groups indicated that personal stories that were graphic or emotional in nature may be effective.



The Rural Transportation Safety and Security Center is a program of the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at NDSU
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