

TABOO OF ALCOHOL AND ROAD SAFETY POLICIES IN ALGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to show the real dimension of drunk driving in Algeria through the statistics of road accidents, the evolution of the legislative framework concerning driving while drunk and road preventive actions undertaken to fight against this risk factor. We first analyzed the statistics published by the National Centre for Road Safety (NCRS) in recent years to present the part of driving while drunk in the national data of road accidents. Then we retraced the evolution of the legislative framework for road safety particularly the laws governing driving while drunk. Finally, an overview of how the mass media process and disseminate information related to road traffic accidents, especially one devoted to driving while drunk and that has been achieved to show the part of the means of information in road safety. The results show that driving under the influence of alcohol is behind a significant number of road traffic accidents in Algeria. The results also show that the legislative framework concerning this risk is limited to the fixing of rates of blood alcohol concentrations authorized for driving. These same results reveal the absence of sensitization actions, information and research for this risk factor particular by the mass media. Driving while drunk is a real problem for road safety in Algeria which preserves an unclear representation in the society and constitutes a taboo subject which slows down road safety policies.

Key words: Alcohol, driving while drunk, driving under influence of alcohol, road safety, Algeria

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that driving requires concentration, attention, appropriate skills, common sense and a concern for the safety of all road users, especially those who are vulnerable (ECE, 2010). Furthermore the consumption of substances that influence the behavior has measurable negative effects on road safety, alcohol is the main problem (Siegrist, 2006). Indeed, consumption of alcohol can seriously affect the perception of the driver, reduce his ability to react and deal safely with unexpected or unforeseen events, and may be fatal for both the driver and other road users. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), driving while intoxicated increases both the risk of accidents and the probability of death or serious trauma (WHO, 2009). In Algeria, there is not enough knowledge about the real dimension of the phenomenon of driving under the influence of alcohol, there is also a lack of important elements for determining the categories of users the most affected. Large deficiencies also exist regarding the preventive measures to be taken. This work attempts to tackle the problem of driving under the influence of alcohol in Algeria in terms of statistical data published by the authorities concerned, laws that regulate driving under the influence of alcohol and the road preventive actions undertaken to fight against this risk factor.

METHOD

This study was carried out in Algeria, a country of more than 35 million inhabitants and where the rate of motorisation is the fastest in the whole of the Maghreb

region. First, data published by the National Centre for Road Safety (NCRS) from 2005 to 2010 were analyzed in order to present the part concerning driving while drunk. Then the evolution of the legislative framework concerning the road safety especially the laws regulating the driving while intoxicated was assessed. This is the Law No. 1-14 of 19 August 2001 completed and modified by the law N ° 04-16 of 10 November 2004 and by Ordinance No. 09-03, 22 July 2009. Finally, the results of a study on the ways that the mass media treat and disseminate the information related to the road traffic accidents in Algeria during 2008 were presented. The corpus consists of 276 articles published in four newspapers (the most read in 2008), radio records (programs + radio spots) and television documents (programs + TV spots) that tackled the problem of road accidents.

RESULTS

Alcohol and road safety

According to statistics published by the NCRS the number of accidents that occurred during 2010 in Algeria were 32,873 with 52,435 casualties and 3,660 deaths. Human factor was behind more than 80% of the accidents recorded. All of the causes related to the human factor are presented in Table 1.

It appears that drunk driving represents one of the causes of road traffic accidents in Algeria with 1.37% of accidents caused by human factors in 2010. It is clear that these numbers are probably lower than the actual, due to the lack systematic analysis of control in traffic and the lack of autopsies of deaths. Furthermore, the risk of drunk driving is the cause of accidents not only of the driver but also of

Table 1. Human factors related to road traffic accidents in Algeria (NCRS, 2010)

Human factors	Number of accidents	(%)
Non respect of the regulatory speed	8382	25.50
Loss of control	5177	15.75
Non compliance of pedestrian	3996	12.16
Non respect for the signals	2807	8.54
Dangerous overtaking	2527	7.69
Non respect of the safety distance	1933	5.88
Non respect of the priority	1595	4.85
Dangerous maneuvers	1054	3.21
Driving without a driving license	491	1.49
Driving while drunk	451	1.37
Parking or dangerous stopping	226	0.69
Non respect of the charge	188	0.57
Hit and run crime	178	0.54
Use of mobile phone	79	0.24
Blinded by the light	67	0.24
Total	29,151	8868

pedestrians for which we have no data. Moreover, the percentage change of driving while drunk in road traffic accidents from 2005 to 2010 is presented in Table 2.

According to this table drunk driving is responsible for an annual average of 2.16% of the recorded accidents between 2005 and 2010 (NCRS, 2010). Although the proportions may seem relatively low in terms of frequency, what is worrying is the absence of reliable data on the categories of users involved and the recorded and exceeded rates of alcohol.

Table 2. Percentage of drunk driving in road traffic accidents (NCRS, 2010)

Year	Number of accidents	Alcohol related (%)
2005	39233	2.99
2006	40885	2.51
2007	39010	1.86
2008	40481	2.63
2009	41224	1.60
2010	32873	1.37

Alcohol and road safety policy

The first actions on road safety go back to the 80s with the appearance of the Law No. 87-09 of 10 February 1987. This law came to provide public authorities with tools to improve road safety. In this sense, the law determines the speed limit in urban areas and in open country. Also, the use of seat belt for road safety became compulsory. The permitted blood alcohol concentration for driving the vehicle is set at 0.80 g/l of blood. These preventive measures were then reinforced by the Law No. 01-14 of 19 August 2001 which abrogated the Law 87-09. Among the most important innovations introduced by this new law include the drastic reduction of the level of alcohol permitted in the blood of road vehicle drivers to 0.10 g/l of blood. The effects of these prevention efforts were ephemeral as the number of accidents has continued to increase. The statistics show that the human factor is the main cause of the accidents with an average annual rate

of 80%. In this regard the government has decided to revise the legislative framework concerning the road safety which led to the promulgation of the Law 04-16 of 10 November 2004, which modified and completed the law of 19 August 2001 concerning the organization, security and police road traffic. This law aims mainly to improve the system of controls to improve road safety. In this sense, the law envisages, as administrative penalties, 34 cases of immediate retrieve of the driving license with suspension of the ability to drive including driving while drunk and under the influence of substances or plants classified as narcotics. Concerning violations with writing minutes in addition to the possibility of suspension or cancellation of driver's license with the agreement of the *wali* (head of province), twelve (12) other cases were set for the new holders of a temporary driving certificate among which are the drunk driving, and the driving under the influence of substances or plants classified as narcotics. The Ordinance No. 09-03, July 22, 2009, which modified and completed the Law No. 16-04, and especially in its article 2 has helped to define the drunken state as a state which is characterized by the presence of alcohol in the blood at a rate equal to or higher than 0.20 g/l of blood. It appears that the permitted blood alcohol levels have recorded variations from 1987 to 2009. There is no information on the manner used for fixing these rates but this already marks the presence of risk associated with driving while drunk in Algeria.

Concerning information and sensitization activities, the results of a study on how the mass media treat and disseminate the information related to the road traffic accidents in Algeria (Bencherif et al., 2012) show that the articles of the

press which deal with the road traffic accidents are few compared to the high number of accidents. Driving while drunk was treated in a general way and consequently little information was provided about this risk factor. For sound recordings (radio) and audiovisual (television) we noted the total absence of programmes, spot advertising and sensitization campaigns that deal with drunk driving compared to the other factors such as speeding, dangerous parking and use of cell phone. The latter two factors were not as important a risk as driving while drunk, according to statistics of NCRS.

It seems that the regulatory dispositions and the actions of information and sensitization initiatives planned to fight against driving while drunk in Algeria is still insufficient. These insufficiencies are related to the absence of reliable data on the extent of the problem (user categories, quantities consumed, etc.), on its causes (personal, social, economic) and its consequences (costs on healthcare, social costs, economic costs).

Driving while drunk is primarily a social problem

In many Western societies, the consumption of alcoholic drinks is strictly controlled and considerable means are used to sensitize the public to the harmful effects of alcohol on health and accident risks (Bay, 2010; Hamelin et al., 2011). Moreover, in most Arab and Muslim countries that prohibit the presence of alcohol, its consumption is increasingly widespread in the societies and especially among youth and constitutes a real problem for road safety in these countries in the lack and deficiencies in the strategies to control this problem. In Algeria, the social use of alcohol preserves a fuzzy

representation and constitutes a taboo subject in a society that forbids the consumption while setting limits for excess consumption for driving. Indeed, driving under the influence of alcohol is a sign of a vast social problem regarding the sociocultural situation of Algeria. Moreover, the perception of the actors in our society concerning alcohol did not change much and alcohol was not recognized until now as a real danger in the lack of information and especially of research which is an essential element for the knowledge of the risk and which helps in shaping public action on road safety (Hamelin et al., 2011).

CONCLUSION

In recent years, road safety matters have received greater attention of governments in Algeria. However, the results show that much remains to be done. This work shows the importance of the issue of alcohol on the road in Algeria and the limits of current policies to fight this problem. It particularly emphasizes the fact that alcohol is a serious social problem for the road users particularly drivers. It also emphasizes the fact that alcohol is a taboo subject for which you must open the debate and start the search on the extent of driving while drunk and how to implement for the fight against this problem.

Finally, the results of this study showed that three factors determine the strategy against driving while drunk in Algeria: (1) the recognition of the risk of drunk driving by the different actors in society; (2) knowledge of this risk in terms of experimentation, exposure and development of regulations; and (3) the establishment and monitoring of functioning of the education system, training, sensitization and

traffic enforcement by mobilizing the necessary human and financial resources.

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