



Applying Theory to Crime: **DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE**

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program separates criminal offenses into two categories: Part I and Part II crimes. Part I offenses include criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Part II offenses include fraud, vandalism, gambling, and driving under the influence (DUI). The UCR defines DUI as “driving or operating a motor vehicle or common carrier while mentally or physically impaired as the result of consuming an alcoholic beverage or using a drug or narcotic.”²⁴ According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have laws defining what constitutes “drunk driving.” These laws designate a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) at or above a certain level; currently, this level is 0.08% (i.e., 0.08 grams of alcohol per 100 milliliters of blood).²⁵

The FBI reported a total of 1,117,852 DUI arrests in the United States in 2014, with a national rate of 348.6 arrests per 100,000. When examining these rates by region, the West reported the highest rate (408.6), followed by the Midwest (373.3), the South (318.1), and the Northeast (285.4). Overall, there was a 21.8% decrease in DUI arrests from 2005 to 2014. Specifically, for those under 18 years of age, there was a 63.5% decrease; for those

18 years of age or older, there was a 26.4 decrease.²⁶

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that every day, almost 28 people in the United States die due to motor vehicle accidents involving an alcohol-impaired driver. The annual cost of alcohol-related accidents totals more than \$44 billion. At all BAC levels, young people are at a higher risk of being involved in an alcohol-related accident compared with older people. In 2014, three out of every 10 fatal crashes involved someone between 21 and 24 years of age (30%), followed by those between 25 and 34 (29%) and those between 35 and 44 (24%).²⁷

One of the suggestions to prevent death and injury due to impaired driving is to reduce the legal BAC limit to 0.05%. “[The National Transportation Safety Board has] pushed for states to reduce the threshold for DWI/DUI to 0.05 BAC or lower because research clearly shows that most people are impaired by the time they reach 0.05.”²⁸

Another suggested prevention is to install ignition interlock devices in vehicles. This device is installed in the vehicle, usually in the glove compartment on the passenger’s side. It is then wired to the engine’s ignition system. In a vehicle with such a device installed, the driver has to blow about 1.5 liters of air into a

handheld alcohol sensor unit. If his or her BAC is over a preset limit, the car will not start. While these preset limits vary by state, they are usually between 0.02% and 0.04%.²⁹ All 50 states have some type of ignition interlock law. Twenty-three states have mandatory ignition interlock provisions for all offenses. California currently has a pilot program in four of its largest counties. While Colorado and Maine’s laws are not mandatory for the first conviction, there are incentives to install the device on the first conviction.³⁰ For instance, in Florida, certain individuals convicted of DUI are required to install an ignition interlock device. The defendant has to contact specific vendors who install approved devices. If the court determines that the offender is unable to pay for the installation of the device, then a portion of the fine paid by the offender can be reallocated to the costs of the installation.³¹

THINK ABOUT IT:

1. Do you think these efforts, such as lowering the BAC or requiring offenders to install an ignition interlock program, deter individuals from driving while under the influence?
2. Do you think if these laws were removed “from the book,” more people would drive while under the influence?