

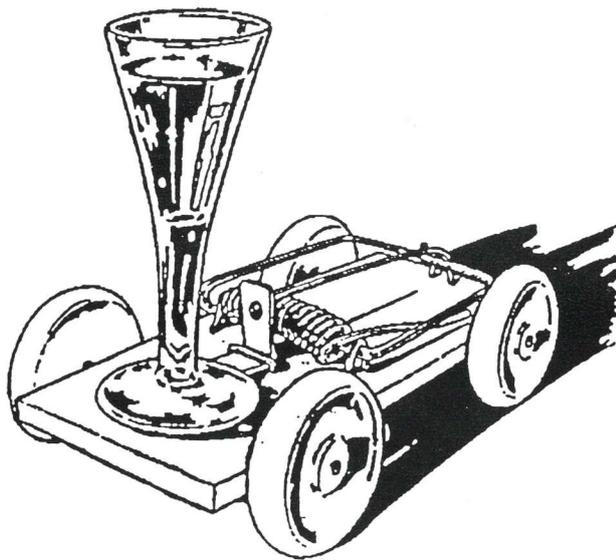
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RATTFÄLLAN (THE TRAP): Evaluation of an Educational Programme for Imprisoned Drunk Drivers in Sweden: Recidivism Rate within Four Years

Jan Törnros

Reprint from Journal of Traffic Medicine (1994) Vol 22, No 1, pp 15–18



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Törnros J. RATTFÄLLAN (THE TRAP): Evaluation of an Educational Programme for Imprisoned Drunk Drivers in Sweden: Recidivism Rate within Four Years. *J Traffic Med* 1994;22:15-18.

The aim of the present article is to describe the recidivism rate after participation in an educationally based programme for imprisoned D.W.I. offenders in Sweden, and to compare with the outcome for matched control subjects. It was found that the recidivism rate, within four years of the programme, for first offenders participating was 12.5%, compared to 19.5% for the control sample, a significant difference. Of repeat offenders more than 43% reoffended with very similar outcome for the two comparison groups.

Keywords: drunk driver, imprisonment, educational programme, recidivism

INTRODUCTION

A significant number of individuals are convicted of drunk driving in Sweden each year. In 1990 roughly 4300 of these DWI offenders were sentenced to imprisonment with drunk driving as the main offence. About 3400 of these were first offenders.

Since 1984 imprisoned DWI offenders are given the option to participate in an educational programme, called "Rattfällan" ("The Trap"). It started in a small scale. At the time of the study the programme had been implemented in nine prisons of the country.

Participation in the programme, which is voluntary, has no consequence for the severity of the sentence. The participants are to the largest extent first offenders, since it is believed that these participants are better suited for such

educationally based programmes than are repeat offenders.

The programme generally has a duration of four hours a day, five days a week, during a four-week period.

A basic aim of the programme is to educate the participants to understand the risks associated with their drinking by providing information on topics such as physiological and psychological effects of alcohol, effects on driving and traffic safety, and drunk driving legislation including the penalty system. The programme is presented in face-to-face lectures in small groups, mostly given by personnel of the prison staff. Guest lecturers, such as AA members, psychologists, medical doctors, or lawyers are frequent guests. Group discussions are encouraged. A central ingredient is to give the participant the opportunity to come to realize that he or she has

an alcohol problem. Another important aim is to establish personal contacts with members of organisations or institutions offering different forms of treatment.

Apart from attitudinal change, a further and ultimate aim of the programme, is behaviour change, notably reduced recidivism.

The present study was conducted to assess the DWI recidivism of the programme participants and to compare this outcome with that of a matched control group.

METHOD

During 1986 and 1987, 818 persons participated in the programme. After exclusion of those who could either not be identified, had died or had not committed a DWI offence, 729 persons remained in the study group, all of whom had committed a DWI offence prior to the imprisonment.

90% of the programme participants had DWI as their main offence. About 90% were males. More than half were between 25 and 45 years of age. The criminal records of the participants could be summarized as follows (restricted to the last five years before the start of the imprisonment): 84% were first offenders. 8% were repeat offenders with only DWI offenses, 4% were repeat offenders with DWI and other kinds of offenses, and the remaining group, repeat offenders with no previous DWI offenses also constituted 4% of the participants.

The recidivism rate of the 729 individuals was studied during a four-year period after the end of imprisonment. The recidivism data was gathered from criminal records (reconvictions).

An individually matched control sample was selected from other imprisoned individuals, not participating in the programme. The matching variables were:

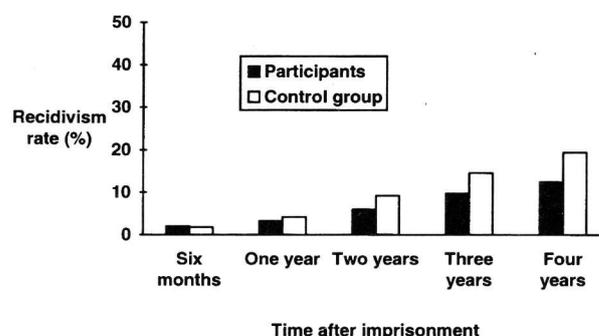
1. Age (± 3 years),
2. Time of the start of imprisonment (± 2 months),
3. Gender,
4. Criminal background (restricted to the last five

years before the start of imprisonment),
5. Main offence.

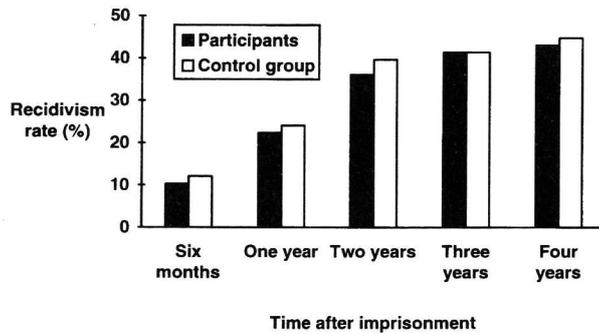
RESULTS

The matching procedure worked perfectly well for 611 of the 729 programme participants.

Slightly more than 90% of these 611 persons were first offenders. Figure 1 presents the recidivism rate for this group of participants compared to the control sample at different time intervals after the end of imprisonment. The difference between the two groups is found statistically significant after the four year follow-up period (12.5% and 19.5% respectively; $X^2=10.23$; $p<.01$). A significant difference between the two comparison groups is also found after two years (6.0% and 9.2% respectively; $X^2=4.17$, $p<.05$) and after three years (9.8% and 14.6% respectively; $X^2=6.15$, $p<.02$).



For repeat offenders, who constituted approximately 9% of all programme participants, the recidivism rate is shown in Figure 2. The outcome is very similar for the participants compared to the control sample for every time interval studied after the end of imprisonment. Only a very small tendency in favour of the participants is evident; after four years the recidivism rate was 43.1% for the participants, compared to 44.8% for the control subjects. No result from X^2 -testing even approaches significance. When looking at the results for each of the three reoffender groups separately, it is found that in every case the outcome is practically the same for the participants and the control subjects.



The majority (80%) of the participants were males with drunk driving as their main offence. The matching procedure worked perfectly well for 94% of this group of participants. The recidivism rate after four years was 14.3% for these participants, compared to 21.6% for the control subjects; a significant difference ($X^2=9.95$; $p<.01$).

Another way to show the difference between comparison groups with respect to recidivism is to study the difference between DWI offenses before compared to after the imprisonment.

For first offenders it was found that 90% of the participants had a reduced number of DWI offenses during the four-year follow-up in comparison with the five-year period preceding the imprisonment. This figure is 84% for the control group. When tested with respect to statistical significance it is found that a greater proportion of the participants (compared to the control group) have experienced an improvement in this regard ($X^2= 9,72$; $p<.01$).

DISCUSSION

As was mentioned earlier, the matching procedure worked very well for 84% of the programme participants. An attempt has been made to study whether any bias may have been introduced since perfect matching was not possible in all cases. Based on this analysis, described elsewhere [1], the conclusion seems justified that the estimated difference between participants and control subjects is in no case an overestimation of the "true" difference.

The result can be summarized as follows. First offenders participating in the programme had a

lower recidivism rate than the corresponding control group. The reduction is approximately 1/3 after two, three and after four years.

For repeat offenders the participants had a recidivism rate comparable to that of the corresponding control sample.

This difference regarding outcome for these two groups (first offenders versus repeat offenders) is completely in accordance with the implicit hypothesis of the study.

It can be discussed whether a relatively short programme like "Rattfällan" could have such long term effects. After all, it is perfectly reasonable to assume that the longer time that passes, the more likely it is that other factors may intervene that will influence the probability of recidivism, but that are not related to the participation. Nevertheless, it seems probable that effects on DWI recidivism could be obtained after a relatively long time period, because, for one thing, considering the very low risk of being caught while driving under the influence, one needs time to do this. It should also be reminded that one of the aims of the programme is to establish contacts with organisations offering treatment of alcohol problems. It is reasonable to assume that, provided the programme has had any success in this respect, time is needed for effects to appear.

The difference between participants and control subjects regarding recidivism should be seen against the background that the participants appear to have had somewhat more advanced alcohol habits than the control group before entering the programme [1]. The participants therefore probably had a worse prognosis from this point of view, and in spite of that did better after the programme.

A word of caution is required, though. The design of the present study suffers from inherent weaknesses. The design to be preferred, comparison between randomised groups, could not be chosen from different reasons. The second best design, comparison between matched groups, was chosen instead. This way, a few more

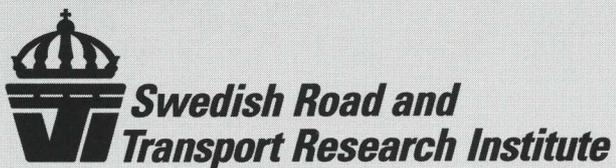
or less important factors could be controlled (sex, age, main offence, time of imprisonment, and criminal background). However, there are other factors, not controlled by the design, that may have had an influence on the outcome. Of these, especially one stands out as important, namely the motivation factor; it cannot be excluded that there may have been a difference between the participants and control subjects in this respect before the start of the programme. If that is the case, the difference between programme participants and control subjects with respect to recidivism may, at least partly, be an effect of this uncontrolled factor. The consequence of this fact is that it is not clear to what extent the good and promising result for the first offenders is in fact an effect of programme participation.

Of other possible effect measures, it was reported elsewhere [1] that participants in the "Rattfällan" programme appeared to gain knowledge from participation in the programme. It was also found [1] that programme participants seemed to acquire more strict attitudes to drunk driving compared to a matched control group.

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