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RATTFÄLLAN

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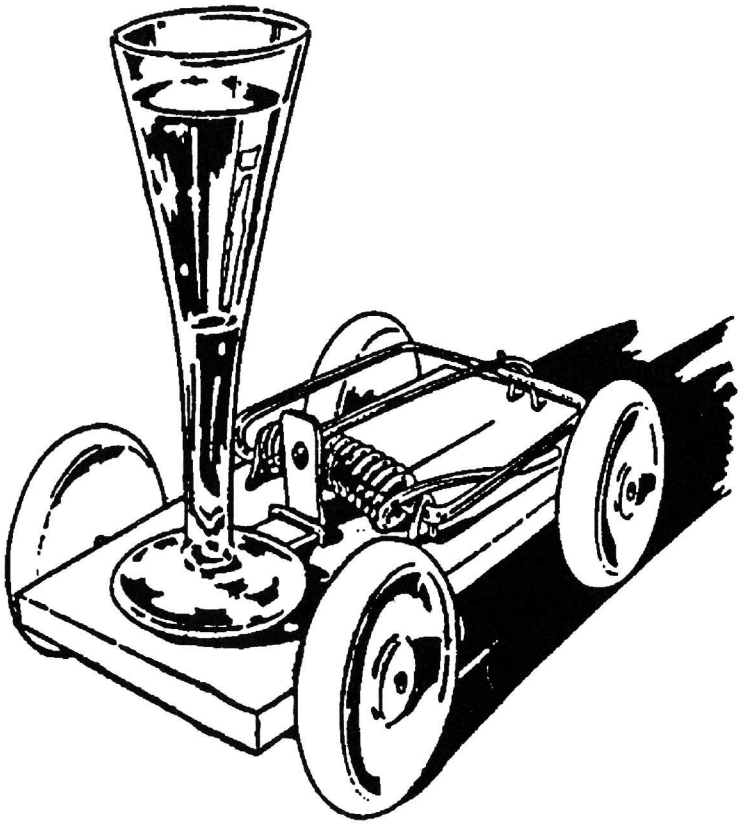

Evaluation of an educational program for imprisoned drunk drivers

Jan Törnros

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Since 1984 imprisoned drunk drivers in Sweden have the opportunity to participate in an educational program, called "Rattfällan" ("The Trap"). It started in a very small scale. At the time of the study presented here, there were programs in nine prisons. In general, lessons are given four hours a day, five days a week, and the program has a duration of four weeks. Participation is voluntary. It is intended especially for those not previously sentenced for drunk driving.
The aim was to evaluate this program. To this end two studies were performed. The first one dealt with rates of drunk driving recidivism, based on criminal records (reconvictions). The other study was a questionnaire study, where participants in the program were asked to answer questions regarding their alcohol habits, and their knowledge about and attitudes towards matters relating to alcohol and alcohol/traffic. They were also asked to give an evaluation of the program.

Recidivism study

In the recidivism study, those offenders with drunk driving in their sentence who participated in the program during 1986 and 1987 (729 subjects), were compared to an individually matched control sample of imprisoned drunk drivers who did not participate in the program. Matching variables were age, sex, time of imprisonment, previous criminal record and principal offence.
For those not sentenced to prison or probation during the last 5 years prior to imprisonment, who constituted the largest participant group (exceeding 80 %), it was found that the reconviction rate was 6.0 % compared to 9.0 % for the control group, a significant difference. For men with drunk driving as their principal offence (80 % of the participants), the reconviction rate was 7.9 % for the participants and 11.0 % for the controls, a non-significant difference. For women with drunk driving as their principal offence (9 % of the participants) the reconviction rate was 4.2 %, exactly the same as that of the control subjects.

Questionnaire study

In the questionnaire study those offenders with drunk driving in their sentence who participated in the program during the first six months of 1989, were asked to answer a questionnaire on three occasions; 1. after arriving to the prison, but before the program started (67 items covering mainly attitudes, knowledge, alcohol habits) 2. after the end of the program but before leaving the prison (54 items covering mainly attitudes, knowledge, program evaluation), and 3. six months after the end of imprisonment (23 items covering mainly attitudes, alcohol habits and program evaluation).

Items (total exceeding 60): examples

a. Attitudes

"The lower BAC limit is 50 mg%. Which limit would you prefer?"

"The upper BAC limit is 150 mg%. Which limit would you prefer?"

"Driving a car with BAC slightly below 50 mg% is:
a. quite in order
b. a bit irresponsible
c. rather irresponsible
d. very irresponsible"

"Driving a car with BAC slightly above 50 mg% is:
a. quite in order
b. a bit irresponsible
c. rather irresponsible
d. very irresponsible"

"Driving a car with BAC around 150 mg% is:
a. quite in order
b. a bit irresponsible
d. rather irresponsible
e. very irresponsible"

b. Knowledge

"Having developed alcohol tolerance means that you get a lower BAC from the same amount of alcohol:
a. correct
b. incorrect"

"25 % of all Swedish men are abstainers: a. correct b. incorrect"

"A person who engages in drunk driving abroad can be sentenced for that offence in Sweden: a. correct b. incorrect"

"The risk for a car driver of being killed in a traffic accident is about 7 times greater with a BAC of 100 mg%, compared to when sober: a. correct b. incorrect"

c. Alcohol habits

"Do you think you drink too much?"

"Do you think or suspect that you have problems with alcohol?"

"Do you think that you can take more alcohol now than before?"

"Have you been drunk for days without interruption during the last 6 months?"

"How much money did you spend on alcohol during the last 6 months?"

"How often were you drunk during the last 6 months?"

"How many times did you engage in drunk driving during the last 6 months?"

d. Program evaluation

"Do you think the program was valuable to you?"

"Do you think the program should be made compulsory for imprisoned drunk drivers?"

"What is your opinion about the contents of the program?"

The questionnaire study deals almost exclusively with the largest participant group, men with drunk driving as their principal offence (256 subjects = 94 % of the participants). It was found that these participants on the second occasion answered the knowledge items in an improved way compared to how they answered them before the start of the program. 11 out of 20 items were thus answered in a statistically significant way on the second occasion. 5 items were improved, however not significantly so. Attitudes also changed. More of the persons stated after end of the program than before that the lower pro mil limit of drunk driving should be lowered:

"The lower BAC limit is 50 mg%. Which limit would you prefer?"

	Before program	After program
0 mg%	18.6 %	23.3 %
10 - 40 mg%	13.5 %	18.1 %
50 mg% or higher	67.9 %	58.6 %

More of them also expressed the view after the end of the program, that driving at a BAC around 50 mg% is an irresponsible act. Results for BAC slightly below the limit:

"Driving a car with BAC slightly below 50 mg% is:"

	Before program	After program
Quite in order	14.3 %	9.8 %
A bit irresponsible	32.1 %	26.8 %
Rather irresponsible	32.3 %	28.6 %
Very irresponsible	22.3 %	34.8 %

The view presented in the curriculum that alcoholism should be considered as a disease, was adopted by a significant number of persons. Their views on the motives for drinking also changed. Their views on their drinking habits did not change much, however. The program was regarded as a positive experience by almost 90 % of the participants:

"Do you think the program was valuable to you?"

Very much so	48.4 %
Rather much so	41.2 %
Doubtful	9.9 %
No	.5 %

Another example of the participants' positive evaluation of the program:

"Do you think the program should be made compulsory for imprisoned drunk drivers?"

Yes	83.1 %	No	16.9 %

The number of non-respondents was not large in this part of the study, about 11 %. It is not to be expected that at least the major results would not stand, had these subjects chosen to answer the second questionnaire as well as the first one.

In order to have a better possibility to tie changes over time to program participation, an individually matched control sample of imprisoned drunk drivers was used in this study as well. The matching variables were the same as in the recidivism study. The control subjects were asked to answer identical items regarding attitudes, alcohol habits and knowledge, as the participants, but only on the first and on the third occasion. Comparisons were made between those 168 participants who answered the last questionnaire and those 168 matched control subjects who also did so.

Before the program the differences between the two groups were small both regarding attitudes and knowledge. Six months after imprisonment the two groups' answers were different for many items. The participants thus reported to a greater extent that the pro mil limit for drunk driving, both the lower and the upper limit (150 mg%), should be lowered. Data for the lower limit:

"The lower BAC limit is 50 mg%. Which limit would you prefer?"

Before program

	Participants	Controls
0 mg%	19.0 %	18.8 %
10 - 40 mg%	14.7 %	15.1 %
50 mg% or higher	66.3 %	66.1 %

After program

	Participants	Controls
0 mg%	35.5 %	21.6 %
10 - 40 mg%	19.3 %	21.7 %
50 mg% or higher	45.2 %	56.7 %

Six months after release from prison they also regarded it to be irresponsible to drive under the influence of alcohol, whether moderately intoxicated or drunk, to a greater degree than the control sample. Data for moderate intoxication:

"Driving a car with BAC slightly below 50 mg% is:"

Before program

	Participants	Controls
Quite in order	12.5 %	13.9 %
A bit irresponsible	32.7 %	39.4 %
Rather irresponsible	30.4 %	29.7 %
Very irresponsible	24.4 %	17.0 %

After program

	Participants	Controls
Quite in order	4.2 %	12.8 %
A bit irresponsible	25.2 %	32.3 %
Rather irresponsible	32.3 %	24.4 %
Very irresponsible	38.3 %	30.5 %

On all items regarding attitudes the participants changed over time. The control subjects also changed in similar ways but to a much smaller extent.

The alcohol habits of the participants tended to be somewhat more advanced than those of the control group. After the end of the program the difference between the two comparison groups regarding alcohol habits were very small:

Before program

"How often were you drunk during last year?"

	Participants	Controls
Daily	.6 %	.6 %
Once or a couple of times a week	15.7 %	9.7 %
More seldom	77.0 %	81.8 %
Never	6.7 %	7.9 %

After program

"How often have were you drunk during the last six months?"

	Participants	Controls
Daily	0.0 %	.6 %
Once or a couple of times a week	4.8 %	7.2 %
More seldom	63.1 %	66.1 %
Never	32.1 %	26.1 %

During the six months after imprisonment 8.4 % of the participants declared that they had been driving under the influence from alcohol. The corresponding figure for the control group was 7.3 %, a non-significant difference. For drunk driving the following non-significant result emerged:

"How many times did you engage in drunk driving during the last six months?"

	Participants	Controls
Never	95.8 %	95.8 %
Once or twice	3.6 %	3.0 %
Three times or more	.6 %	1.2 %

Both groups claim, to a similar degree, that they had been drinking less alcohol after leaving the prison compared to the situation before imprisonment.

A trend is evident for those participants who answered the questionnaire on all three occasions; where changes occurred from the first to the last occasion, a similar but much smaller change took place between the first and the second occasion.

Questions answered in the last questionnaire relating to life functioning shows a slight tendency for a somewhat more positive development for the participants.

Regarding views on the program, six months after imprisonment over 80 % of the participants still regarded the program quite positively:

"Do you think the program was valuable to you?"

Very much so	41.4 %
Rather much so	40.1 %
Doubtful	17.3 %
No	1.2 %

In the part of the questionnaire study where a control group was used, relatively large numbers of subjects did not respond to both questionnaires. Of those subjects who were to constitute the pool from which the control sample was to be selected, about 22 % refused to participate in the study. In both groups a significant number of persons did not return the questionnaires 6 months after release; about 1/3 of the program participants and about 1/4 of the control subjects.

It was found that those who did not respond had more severe criminal backgrounds than those who answered the questionnaires. Where such information was available, the non-respondents also reported more advanced alcohol habits.

Because of the relatively large numbers of persons who did not cooperate fully, the results regarding differences between program participants and control subjects should be interpreted with caution.

Comment

The selection of offenders for program participation was done in different ways. There was, however, no random assignment of subjects to the comparison groups (participants were volunteers, whereas controls either chose not to attend or, more commonly, were not given the option of program participation). Because of the limitations of the design, being quasi-experimental instead of experimental, it cannot be ruled out that the differences obtained between comparison groups in the two studies might, to an unknown extent, be attributed to factors other than program participation, factors not controlled by the design. One such uncontrolled factor which may be of critical relevance is the motivation factor.