Drunk Drivers Have Significantly Higher Rates of Alcohol and Drug Dependence

Men and women convicted of driving while impaired (DWI) are more likely to be diagnosed with past-year alcohol or drug dependence, according to a New Mexico study of DWI offenders.† Over two-thirds of male DWI offenders and 30% of female DWI offenders were dependent on alcohol in the past year, compared to 16% and 5% of adults living in the western United States. Similarly, 12% of male and 10% of female DWI offenders were diagnosed with past-year drug dependence, compared to 4% of men and 3% of women in the general western U.S. population. Female DWI offenders were also more likely to have experienced other psychiatric problems, such as a major depressive disorder, in the past year. The authors conclude that “drunk-driving offenders need assessment and treatment services not only for alcohol problems but also for drug use and the other psychiatric disorders that commonly accompany alcohol-related problems” (p. 943).

Percentage of New Mexico DWI Offenders and Percentage of Western U.S. General Adult Population With Past-Year Alcohol Dependence, Drug Dependence, or Major Depressive Disorders

*Prevalence of disorder is significantly different between the DWI offender and the general adult population sample, p < .01.

†DWI offender data are from persons convicted of DWI who had been referred and screened by a screening program in Bernalillo County, New Mexico. General adult population data are from the National Comorbidity Survey (NCS). Only subjects who lived in the western region of the U.S. were included for comparison with the New Mexico DWI sample. The NCS sample was weighted to match the DWI sample by age, ethnicity, and educational level.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Lapham S.C., Smith E., C’dé Baca J., Chang I., Skipper B.J., Baum G., Hunt W.C. “Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders Among Persons Convicted of Driving While Impaired,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 58:943-949, 2001. For more information contact Dr. Sandra Lapham at slapham@bhrscs.org.