

# The Hispanic Americans Baseline Alcohol Survey (HABLAS): Rates and predictors of DUI across Hispanic national groups

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## Abstract

This paper examines rates of self-reported driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol and 12-month and lifetime DUI arrest rates among Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans and South/Central Americans in the U.S. population. Using a multistage cluster sample design, a total of 5224 individuals 18 years of age and older were selected from the household population in five metropolitan areas of the U.S.: Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Houston and Los Angeles. The survey weighted response rate was 76%. Among men, 21% of Mexican Americans, 19.9% of South/Central Americans, 11.6% of Puerto Ricans and 6.9% of Cuban Americans reported DUI. Rates were lower among women, ranging from 9.7% for Mexican Americans to 1.3% for Cuban Americans. Mexican American men had the highest 12-month arrest rate (1.6%) and the highest lifetime arrest rate (11.2%). Drinkers who reported DUI were heavier drinkers than those not reporting DUI according to a variety of indicators. However, most DUI incidents involved non-alcohol-dependent drivers. Mexican Americans and South Central Americans, men, younger drivers, those with less than high school education, those with higher income and higher alcohol consumption were more likely to report DUI and DUI arrests. These findings show that Hispanic national groups in the U.S. are diverse regarding drinking and DUI-related experiences.

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## 1. Introduction

Driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI) continues to be a major public health problem in the U.S. After declining from a high rate of 59.5% in 1982 to 39.7% in 1999 as a proportion of all traffic fatalities, alcohol-related traffic fatalities have stabilized since then (Yi et al., 2006). In 2005 there were 16,885 alcohol-related traffic fatalities in the U.S., or 39% of all traffic fatalities (U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 2006). About 86% of the people killed in these motor vehicle crashes were in a car where a driver or non-occupant had a BAC of .08 g/dL or higher (NHTSA, 2006).

As previously discussed by a number of authors, ethnicity has been one of the factors linked with DUI (Caetano and McGrath, 2005; Caetano et al., 2000; Ferguson et al., 2002; Padilla and Morrissey, 1993; Voas et al., 1998). According to some indica-

tors, Hispanics are one of the ethnic groups with a higher than average involvement in DUI. Members of this ethnic group have been found to be over represented among drunk drivers in roadside surveys, alcohol-related fatal crashes and arrests for DUI (Hilton, 2006; Lapham et al., 1998; Perrine et al., 1989; Ross et al., 1991). For instance, data from roadside surveys for 1986 and 1996 showed that Hispanics were 1.5 times more likely than Whites to drive with a BAC at or above .05 (Voas et al., 1998). Data on DUI arrests by ethnicity indicate that Hispanics and other minority groups (e.g., Native Americans) are over represented among arrestees (Caetano, 1984; Chang et al., 1996). In California in 2005, 45.5% of those arrested for DUI were Hispanic, a proportion considerably higher than the state's 32.5% total population of Hispanics (Tashima and Daoud, 2007).

Data from general population household surveys are less consistent on the extent to which Hispanics are involved in DUI in comparison to other groups. Self-reported lifetime arrest rates for DUI in the 1995 National Alcohol Survey (NAS) were higher for Hispanic men (19%) than for White (13%) and Black men (11%) (Caetano and Clark, 2000). Twelve-month arrest rates from the same survey were 1% for White

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and Black men, but 4% for Hispanic men. National surveys have also reported 12-month rates of driving after “having too much to drink” (National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions—NESARC), or after “having drunk enough to be in trouble if the police stopped you” (NAS), or driving “under the influence of alcohol” (National Household Survey on Drug Abuse—NHSDA), or driving “two hours after drinking” (NHTSA). These rates are derived from different questions and thus difficult to compare. In general, they also are higher than 12-month arrest rates. Thus, rates of driving in the 1995 “after having enough to be in trouble if stopped by the police” were similar for White (22%) and Hispanic men (21%), and lower for Black men (14%) (Caetano and Clark, 2000).

In contrast, results from analyses of the combined NHTSA surveys of 1993, 1995 and 1997, which cover the driving population (16 years of age and older), showed that White men reported the highest rate of driving “two hours after drinking” (28%), followed by Hispanic (17%) and Black men (16%) (Royal, 2003). Data from the 2000 NHSDA (Caetano and McGrath, 2005) showed that the 12-month rate of “driving under the influence” for Hispanic men (16.8%) was below that for Native Americans/Alaskan Natives (20.8%) and that for individuals of mixed race (22.5%) but higher than the rate for other groups. In the 2002 NESARC, the 12-month rate of driving “after having too much to drink” for Hispanic men was 3.3%, lower than that for Native Americans (5.9%) and Whites (5%) (Chou et al., 2006; Chou et al., 2005). These rates are lower than those from the NAS and NHTSA probably because these surveys count respondents who engaged in the behavior “more than once,” which is not the case in those other surveys.

The high rate of DUI arrests for Hispanics compared to other ethnic groups have been explained by some as resulting from differential police enforcement of DUI laws. For instance, Hispanics are more likely to be arrested in the vicinity of their drinking place than Whites (Lapham et al., 1998), which may suggest a stronger police presence where Hispanics drink and live. Alternatively, others assert that Hispanics compared to other ethnic groups do not recognize DUI as a highly deviant behavior, possibly due to views brought to this country from Mexico and other Latin American countries where DUI laws are not strictly enforced. However, analysis of national survey data show that U.S.-born Hispanics are more likely than those born abroad to report “driving after having drunk enough to be in trouble if stopped by police,” to report ever arrest for DUI (Caetano and Clark, 2000) and to report driving under the influence (Caetano and McGrath, 2005). A third explanation for the higher arrest rate links Hispanics’ high rate of heavy drinking to their inability to recognize the impairing effects of alcohol on psychomotor abilities necessary for driving. For instance, Hispanic men think that on average they can consume seven drinks before their driving is impaired (Caetano and Clark, 2000). However, this argument is contradicted by other data that reveal that a greater proportion of Hispanics than Whites recognize the adverse effects of alcohol on their ability to drive (Posner and Marin, 1996).

Besides the inconsistency present in these data from the general population, the literature on DUI among Hispanics is limited

because of its lack of attention to potential differences in DUI rates across Hispanic national groups. Yet, when completed, these analyses suggest that there may be considerable differences in DUI rates (Tippets and Voas, 1999). The objective of this paper is to examine rates of self-reported driving after drinking (DUI), 12-month DUI arrest rates and lifetime DUI arrest rates across Hispanic national groups (Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans and South/Central Americans) in the U.S. population. In addition, the paper examines selected alcohol-related data for drinkers who reported DUI or DUI arrest compared to those who do not report such events. Sociodemographic and drinking-related correlates of these events are also identified.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Sample and data collection

Data were collected as part of the 2006 Hispanic Americans Baseline Alcohol Survey (HABLAS). The HABLAS employed a multistage cluster sample design in five selected metropolitan areas of the U.S.: Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Houston and Los Angeles. These sites were chosen because of the large proportion of Hispanics of specific national groups in their population. Thus, most Cuban Americans (98%) were interviewed in Miami, most Mexican Americans in Houston and Los Angeles (87%), most South/Central Americans in Miami (50%) and New York (41%), and most Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia (50%) and New York (50%). After appropriately weighted, respondents are a representative sample of the Hispanic civilian non-institutionalized population aged 18 and older in these sites. A total of 5224 individuals were interviewed, for a weighted response rate of 76%. Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) lasting 1 h in average were conducted in respondents’ homes by trained interviewers, all of which were bilingual English/Spanish. The main topics covered in the interview besides DUI were: sociodemographic information, alcohol consumption, drinking problems, alcohol abuse and dependence, attitudes and norms about drinking, alcohol-related expectancies, alcohol-related intimate partner violence, alcohol-treatment experiences, depression, acculturation and acculturation stress.

### 2.2. Questionnaire translation

This took into account the possibility that respondents in different Hispanic national groups would use different idioms and words in their daily use of Spanish. Thus, once the English questionnaire was pre-tested and finalized, the questionnaire was translated into Spanish by a lead translator, and then independently back-translated. The two versions of the questionnaire, original English and Spanish, were then harmonized by a group of seven translators from different parts of Latin America: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Argentina, Peru, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. This group of translators also created a roster of terms and words that appeared in the questionnaire and that had different usage across the Spanish spoken by different

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