



Driving under the influence of alcohol and perceived invulnerability among young adults: An extension of the theory of planned behavior



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ABSTRACT

This study tested a modified version of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), in driving under the influence of alcohol that incorporated past behavior and perceived invulnerability in a sample of young French adults. Participants ($n = 368$, Mean Age = 23.29, $SD = 3.69$, Age Range 18–35) completed self-report measures of sense of invulnerability, subjective norms attitude, perceived control, intention to drive and drink, and past behavior. This extended model was able to explain 52% of the variance of behavioral intention. In accordance with the TPB, the intention to drink and drive was predicted by Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), Subjective Norms, Past behavior and Attitudes. The effect of perceived invulnerability on the three determinants of TPB was significant. Psychological invulnerability had a direct influence on Attitudes, Danger Invulnerability on PBC and Interpersonal Invulnerability on Attitude and PCB. The current study provides support for the importance of the sense of invulnerability to traffic risk-taking in young adults.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Driving under the influence of alcohol in France

Despite the campaigns for road safety the number of alcohol-related accidents remains a public health problem in France, especially among young drivers (ETSC, 2014). In France, the part played by alcohol in fatal accidents is stable, around 30% for more than ten years. If drink driving concerns all generations except the older generation, 23% of young people between 18 and 24 involved in a fatal accident had drunk alcohol (ONISR, 2014). This trend in young drivers constitutes a special problem since impaired driving performance that involves alcohol consumption (Fillmore, Blackburn, & Harrison, 2008) associated to a lack of experience of car driving (Kelly, Darke, & Ross, 2004; Mann et al., 2010) increase the risk of traffic accidents (Greening & Stoppelbein, 2000; ONISR, 2014). In this context, understanding the dynamics of decision-making in driving under the influence of alcohol among young adults is decisive to provide road traffic injury prevention. Examining the influ-

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ence of social-cognitive factors on the intention to drive under the influence of alcohol among young adults, in line with the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), could play a substantial role in preventing driving after drinking.

1.2. Application of the theory of planned behavior to safety behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991, 2011; Ajzen & Madden, 1986) is one of the most widely used social-cognitive models explaining health-related behavioral intentions (e.g. Booth, Stewart, Curran, Cheney, & Borders, 2014; Kothe & Mullan, 2014; Norman, 2011). The TPB suggests that behavioral intention is the most important and direct determinant of an individual's behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991; Madden, Scholder Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992; Yzer, 2012). According to this theoretical approach, three sets of factors influence the intention to adopt health-related behavior: Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC; see Fig. 1).

According to Ajzen (1991, 2011), Attitudes toward a behavior reflect the individual's evaluative reactions (positive/favorable or negative/unfavorable) toward a particular behavior. The second determinant, Subjective Norms, refers to the individual's beliefs that social referents (e.g., parents, peers, social organizations) approve or disapprove of a particular type of behavior. Thirdly, Perceived Behavioral Control refers to individuals' perceptions of their ability to adopt a given type of behavior (internal factors, skills) or the constraints (external factors) that hinder performance (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, based on the TPB, the Intention to adopt a given type of behavior is influenced by positive expectations, supportive normative beliefs and strong control beliefs (Ajzen, 1991) and is the best and most direct determinant of behavior (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Armitage & Conner, 2001). Applying this model to driving under the influence of alcohol, the predictors of alcohol-impaired driving would thus be a positive attitude toward drive and drink, belief that significant others have a favorable view of them, and confidence in one's ability to control one's conduct.

The TPB has been successfully implemented to predict the performance of a range of health-related behaviors in several countries. A recent meta-analysis (McEachan, Conner, Taylor, & Lawton, 2011) found that the TPB predicted 43.3% (41% in an older meta-analysis, Godin & Kok, 1996) of the variance in Intention to adopt various types of healthy or risky behaviors (e.g. condom use, physical activities) and that PBC, Subjective Norms and Attitude were significant predictors of Intention. The TPB was also used to identify predictors of behaviors related to traffic risks or violations, including alcohol and drug risks. Previous studies (Parker, Manstead, Stradling, & Reason, 1992a; Wallén Warner & Åberg, 2006, 2008) found that the model explained 30–38% of the variance of different driving violations and the most important predictor was Subjective Norms or PBC. Recently, Moan and Rise (2011) found that the TPB explained 16–26% of the variance in the intention “not to drink and drive”, and Marcil, Bergeron, and Audet (2001) indicated that the Attitude, Subjective Norms, and PBC account for 64% of the total variance of the intention to drink and drive. These results can be considered to provide a useful model to explain Intention to drive under the influence of alcohol (with sufficient predictive validity) but, at the same time, a substantial proportion of the variance in behavior remains unexplained, especially for driving under the influence of alcohol.

1.3. An extension of the theory of planned behavior for driving under the influence of alcohol

1.3.1. Past behavior

Ajzen (1991) underlined the contribution of Past behavior (actions or reactions of a person in response to external or internal stimuli in the past) to the predictions of intentions and behavior in particular correlation with PBC. Conner and Armitage (1998) considered Past behavior as a major contributor to Intention and the best predictor of future behavior (Ouellette & Wood, 1998). Also, in previous research, Past behavior was predicted to increase explained variance for the prediction of Intention; in line with many areas where past behavior is routinely incorporated into the TPB model (e.g., Bamberg, Ajzen, & Schmidt, 2003; de Bruijn, Kremers, Singh, van den Putte, & van Machelen, 2009; Forward, 2009; Smith et al., 2007). In light of these studies, it can be assumed that the intention concerning drunk driving involves behavioral habits which can exert a direct effect on driving under the influence of alcohol Intention.

1.3.2. Perceived invulnerability

A further improvement in the application of the TPB to driving under the influence of alcohol was to integrate risk perception as a determinant of the attitudes and the PBC in accordance with a study by Chan, Wu, and Hung (2010). Subjective perceptions of invulnerability to risk play a fundamental role in behavior (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2001). Perceived Invulnerability, an optimistic bias, is described as a personal fable of immunization against risks (cognitive bias) and usually identified as playing a role in adolescents' risk-taking (Aalsma, Lapsley, & Flannery, 2006; Hill, Duggan, & Lapsley, 2012; Millstein & Halpern-Felsher, 2002a, 2002b; Ravert et al., 2009) and in traffic accidents (DeJoy, 1989). Recently, many researchers underlined the importance of the sense of invulnerability in adulthood (Frankenberger, 2000; Millstein & Halpern-Felsher, 2002b). One study in a Chinese population highlights the sense of invulnerability as a major indirect variable of Intentions to drink and drive, by promoting favorable Attitudes and PBC toward driving under the influence of alcohol (Chan et al., 2010). The first empirical results found that the sense of invulnerability decreased the risk perceived (and its consequences), through favorable attitudes, subjective norms toward and higher perceived control over drink-driving (Chan et al., 2010). These findings are important to consider and more studies should be conducted in other cultural contexts.

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