

**THIRTY YEARS OF ALCOHOL  
AND DRINKING DRIVING RESEARCH:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM  
DEVELOPMENT  
AND THEORY**

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**Summary.** This paper summarizes the DUI research that has been conducted by the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University over the past thirty years, and discusses how this research has found practical application in the development and improvement of a statewide DUI educational program. Research enriches such a program; and in turn, the program provides a laboratory for additional research.

Scientists from Mississippi State University's Social Science Research Center (SSRC) first became involved in the study of alcohol education issues in 1959 as part of a comprehensive statewide effort to upgrade alcohol education in the secondary schools of the State of Mississippi (Pomeroy and Globetti, 1969). Since then, the Center has conducted numerous studies on alcohol usage in Mississippi, with particular focus on the drinking/driving issue, and has implemented a statewide DUI education program designed to reduce DUI-related deaths and injuries. This paper traces the history of the SSRC's alcohol/drinking-driving research and program development activities over the past 30 years, and discusses the advantages of integrating empirical research, theory, and program development. The paper contends that the model employed by the SSRC is superior to those that do not integrate these three components because it fosters the formulation of questions that would not be raised in either a purely research or applied setting.

**Establishment of a Statewide DUI Education Program** In 1959 a planning committee composed of individuals from various state agencies and universities was formed to examine ways to improve alcohol education in Mississippi's secondary schools. The recommendations of this committee led to a three-year project funded by the National Advisory Mental Health Council in 1963 to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of developing a comprehensive community oriented alcohol education program. Based on this study, scientists at Mississippi State University were awarded a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health in 1965 to conduct a demonstration project on alcohol education in two Mississippi communities. Research and evaluation were integral parts of this program and resulted in an extensive list of journal articles, Masters theses, and reports dealing with teenage drinking patterns (e.g., Globetti, 1967). This "Comprehensive Community Oriented Alcohol Education Program" served as a model for future endeavors at Mississippi State University that linked community programs to research and evaluation.

This pattern of cooperation between community based programs and research was to become especially important with the establishment of the Mississippi Alcohol Safety Education Program (MASEP) in 1972. Three circumstances existed in the late 1960s and early 1970s that led to the establishment of MASEP. First, large amounts of money were appropriated to combat drunk driving in the nation following passage of the Highway Safety Act in 1967. In Mississippi,

the Governor's Highway Safety Program (GHSP) was the agency designated to administer these funds and carry out the policies of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Second, the Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Program of the State Department of Health received formula grant money to set up an alcohol rehabilitation program in the state. However, a shortage of trained personnel and facilities such as mental health centers and halfway houses made the identification of persons with alcohol problems extremely difficult. If a successful alcohol rehabilitation program was to be established, a mechanism to identify persons with alcohol problems was required. Third, the Mississippi Highway Patrol objected to the widespread practice of reducing drinking/driving charges to reckless driving. This practice made it difficult to identify chronic repeat drinking/driving offenders--those most likely to need alcohol treatment. (Some judges apparently felt that the provision in the Implied Consent Law which mandated a one year loss of drivers license on a first offense was too tough.)

Thus, a unique set of circumstances existed which created a fertile environment for the establishment of a program such as MASEP; and the Governor's Highway Safety Program, the State Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Program, the Highway Patrol, and the SSRC came together and created a comprehensive state-wide DUI education/rehabilitation system that remains intact today.

SSRC scientists proposed that DUI schools largely based on the Phoenix model (Stewart and Malfetti, 1970) be established in Mississippi. Such schools appeared to satisfy a number of the needs of the Mississippi situation: (1) they provided a mechanism to assess the drinking problems of the DUI population, and could be used to refer problem drinkers to the emerging alcohol treatment network in the state; (2) their view of the drunk driver as an average citizen who may have too much to drink on rare occasions seemed to fit the judges perception of the situation (and helped secure judicial support for the program); (3) they provided a mechanism to soften the perceived harshness of the Implied Consent Law after the law was amended to allow drivers license reinstatement for offenders who completed the school; and (4) there was a widespread belief in Mississippi that education could solve the problem. The development of MASEP involved all of the participating agencies. There was a feeling that housing the program in the Social Science Research Center would insulate it to some degree from political interference and ensure a strong research and evaluation component. Indeed, research and evaluation have been important emphases of MASEP since its inception, and have provided a solid foundation of information upon which program development has been based. Thus, in a cyclical fashion, the

program furnished information and insight which, in turn, has been used to improve the program.

### Summary of DUI Research

Early MASEP research was primarily descriptive. Personal data questionnaires were used to collect information from the program participants on demographic characteristics, drinking behavior, reasons for drinking, prior arrests, etc.; and several articles, Masters theses, and reports were based on analyses of these data (e.g., Weeber, 1981).

An excellent opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the program presented itself in 1975 when the Social Science Research Center was awarded a contract from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to conduct the Mississippi DUI Probation Follow-Up Project. The fact that MASEP operated statewide, had a research component, and had strong, ongoing, cooperative relationships with its founding agencies were important factors contributing to the award of this contract.

The major purpose of the DUI Probation Follow-Up Project was to measure the relative effectiveness of probation compared to other treatments (including DUI schools) and a control group in reducing DUI recidivism and crash involvement (for a complete discussion of the DUI Probation Follow-Up Project, see Landrum et al., 1982). The project utilized a true experimental design complete with random assignment and a control group.

In terms of its stated goals, results of the DUI Probation Follow-Up Project's initial two-year evaluation were disappointing. While DUI schools combined with probation appeared to reduce DUI recidivism, none of the other treatment modalities were shown to be effective. In particular, MASEP by itself did not appear to decrease the incidence of subsequent drinking/driving arrests.

However, a series of secondary findings, some of which were serendipitous, have generated or inspired a number of other studies, and have provided background information that has been of value both to the development of theory and to program improvement. It is, perhaps, in terms of these secondary findings that the DUI Probation Follow-Up Project has made its greatest contributions. For example, the criteria used to screen DUI offenders into problem or nonproblem categories was found to be very accurate with regard to predicting DUI recidivism, and has since been adopted by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, as the assessment scheme for the State's multiple DUI offender program. Findings of some unique characteristics among older DUI offenders led to a study of elderly drinking-drivers funded by the Andrus Foundation (Wells-Parker, Miles, and Spencer, 1983). The finding that a substantial proportion of DUI offenders have lengthy arrest records for offenses other than substance abuse and/or traffic safety led to research on criminality among DUI offenders (Wells-Parker, Cosby, and Landrum, 1986); and, the finding that the simple administration of a questionnaire may have a beneficial impact on DUI recidivism (Neff and Landrum, 1983) has played a major theoretical role in the development of a new MASEP curriculum.

Two findings of the DUI Probation Follow-Up Project have been especially

important with regard to influencing the direction of research, theory, and program development among MASEP scientists. First, the project found that very few DUI offenders are "social" drinkers. They are not average citizens who occasionally drink too much. This finding has resulted in a complete change in MASEP's philosophy on DUI education/rehabilitation programs, and a complete revision of the MASEP curriculum. Second, the project found that the DUI population is not homogeneous, but that there are major variations among drinking/drivers in terms of factors such as personality characteristics, sociodemographic characteristics, drinking behaviors, driving behaviors, and risk of traffic accident involvement. This finding, coupled with the finding that certain treatment modalities appeared to be more effective among certain subgroups of DUI offenders than among others, suggested a need to design treatments that are targeted for specific DUI offender subpopulations.

Over the past seven years MASEP scientists have engaged in research designed to contribute to the identification of effective offender-specific DUI countermeasures. Detailed background information on the behaviors, motivations, attitudes, and characteristics of various DUI offender subpopulations was collected from individuals who attended MASEP schools. The DUI offenders who participated in the DUI Probation Follow-Up Project were tracked, some for as long as nine years, to identify evidence of specific treatment effects among various subpopulations of offenders (Wells-Parker, Anderson, Landrum, and Snow, 1988); and a pilot project was funded by NIAAA to develop a multidimensional classification scheme for matching offenders to specific treatment modalities.

In addition, in recent years MASEP scientists have examined such varied issues as the drinking locations and travel patterns of DUI offenders (e.g., Snow and Anderson, 1987), the effects of alcohol consumption and sensation seeking on driving-related risk taking (McMillen and Wells-Parker, 1987), and the relationship between driver's license suspension and unemployment among DUI offenders (Wells-Parker and Cosby, 1988). An NIAAA funded project is attempting to definitively determine whether the administration of the LAI questionnaire has a beneficial effect on DUI recidivism, and another project funded by NIAAA will use techniques such as meta-analysis to summarize the DUI rehabilitation/treatment literature in an attempt to identify effective DUI countermeasures and the factors that contribute to intervention efficacy.

#### **Integrating Research, Theory, and Program Development**

For many years MASEP research findings were not utilized to improve the MASEP program. Even significant findings such as the lack of effectiveness of the DUI schools, the heterogeneity of DUI offenders, the high proportion of problem drinkers, and the substantial number of offenders with extensive criminal arrest records did not result in programmatic changes, despite similar findings emanating from other sources, agencies, and geographical regions. This was largely the result of an administrative structure that divided MASEP into an Operations Unit and a Research Unit.

Change was to come only when this administrative structure was modified. The MASEP Research Unit became the MASEP Research and Program Development Unit, and MASEP researchers were given the responsibility for developing and implementing a new curriculum. This new curriculum--the Group Intervention Approach (GIA)--is now in place, the conceptual underpinnings of which were

derived through research.

In the alcohol/traffic safety field, the distinction between applied and pure research is becoming increasingly blurred. We suggest that new theory may have a greater probability of developing in an applied than in a puristic environment. The potential to organize a wide range of applied findings may at times point more quickly to theoretical anomalies, and thus to questions that have not yet been raised in more insulated puristic environments.

The SSRC model which involves researchers in the program development process appears to have interesting policy ramifications. A dynamic tension is created between researchers and the programmatic staff that will hopefully allow research to find its way into policy and program, thereby narrowing the gap between what is known and what is applied. This alliance is an uneasy one, for both groups have to give up the security of time worn cliches.

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