

## Research study reveals profile for female drink-drivers

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(Medical Xpress) -- Female drink-drivers are more likely to be older, better-educated and divorced, widowed or separated, research has shown.

The study by [academics](#) at The University of Nottingham found that emotional factors and mental health problems were common triggers in alcohol-related offences committed by women.

And they also discovered that rehabilitation programmes that force women to face the [consequences](#) of their crime can intensify their [feelings of guilt](#) and shame, leading them to turn to [alcohol](#) and increasing the risk that they will re-offend.

In a paper to be published in *Clinical Psychology Review* the researchers, led by Professor Mary McMurrin of the Institute of [Mental Health](#), have called for more effective treatment programmes to be designed that are specifically tailored for women.

Professor McMurrin said: “The profile of women drink-driving offenders is of being divorced, widowed or separated and having fewer previous convictions than their male counterparts. Thus, it may be that these women are distressed by their situation and are turning to drink for solace.

“Treatment programs that induce negative emotions may actually increase emotional distress, which may increase drinking and, in turn, increase the likelihood of alcohol-related offending.”

The Nottingham researchers carried out a systematic review of 26 previous studies from around the world to gather evidence that could inform the future development of interventions for alcohol-related offending by women and centred on whether there are differences between men and women who break the law after drinking.

They found:

- Overall women were less likely to drink and drive than men and less likely to be repeat offenders
- Fewer women drink-drivers had previously been arrested for public drunkenness and other alcohol-related offences
- Women drink-drivers were older than men, better educated but had a lower income
- Female drink-driving offenders were more likely than men to be separated, divorced or widowed, whereas men were more likely to be married or single
- Women who got behind the wheel drunk were more likely to have parents and partners who abused alcohol and themselves had a greater history of [mental health problems](#).

Only six studies investigated gender differences in other types of offences, demonstrating that while women are overall less likely to

offend than men, drinking tends to increase the likelihood of offending in both sexes. Drinking also increases the likelihood of violent offending more than other types of offences and the risk of violence after drinking is higher in both men and women. Again, there is evidence that women offenders with alcohol problems have more psychological problems than men. Using drugs in combination with alcohol may also be an issue for women alcohol abusing offenders.

The researchers found only four studies that evaluated treatments specifically designed for women whose offending was linked to alcohol, meaning there was not enough evidence to answer the question of what treatment works most effectively.

However, there was strong evidence to show which approach did not work. A study in New Mexico showed that putting female drink-driving offenders before a panel of people made up of those who have been seriously injured or whose loved ones have been killed in a crash in a collision with a drink-driver to hear about how it has impacted on their lives actually increased the risk of reoffending.

Another American study documented high-risk female offenders who were given a 'life activities' interview as part of their treatment focusing on life adjustment, occupational and financial status. Again, this resulted in a greater rate of offending than those who did not — 44 per cent as opposed to 24 per cent.

Professor McMurrin added: “Programmes designed specifically for women whose offences are alcohol related need to be designed and evaluated. While these may draw on those programmes designed for men, greater attention to broader psychological health issues is needed as these may affect the success of the intervention.

“The information contained in this review may help inform the future

development and design of treatment programmes for this neglected group of offenders.”

An advance unproofed version of the article Interventions for Alcohol-Related Offending by [Women](#): A Systematic Review is available online at [tiny.cc/41liw](http://tiny.cc/41liw) is available on *Clinical Psychology's Online First* web pages.

**More information:** Full report: McMurrin, M., et al., (2011). Interventions for alcohol-related offending by women: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology Review* (in press). [DOI: 10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.005](#)

Provided by University of Nottingham

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