

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) -The First 25 Years



Harrington Driver Training Services

In the early 1980s the public's attitude toward drinking and driving was substantially transformed. Citizen activism is generally given credit for this change. In 1978, Remove Intoxicated Drivers (RID) - the first citizen activist group dedicated to fighting drunk driving was established by Doris Aiken of New York State. But it was not until 1980 that the victim activist movement began to garner national attention. On May 3, 1980, Candy Lightner's 13-year-old daughter, Cari, was struck from behind by a car while walking in the bike lane with her friend. The driver did not stop. Lightner was informed by the California Highway Patrol the day after Cari's funeral that they had arrested a man and charged him with drunk driving; leave the scene of an accident, and vehicular manslaughter. She was told that he had been out of jail only two days since being arrested for another hit-and-run drunk-driving. Five days after her daughter's death Candy Lightner and some friends decided they should start an organization of some kind to fight against drunk drivers. A friend suggested they call it MADD. This launched MADD as the leading national advocate organization. This paper concerns MAADs first 25 years in existence. It looks at the concept of responsible drinking and how MADD responded to the lack of progress over the last decade by setting a goal to reduce the percentage of drunk drivers in fatal crashes by 25% between the years (2006–2008).It also covers MADDs remedial measures for drunk drivers and its participation in safety belt campaigns and it's victim programme of service to the victims of drunk drivers is examined. Finally, a conclusion is given.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) - The First 25 Years

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Introduction

The organization, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) has arguably been one of the most successful public-health grassroots citizen advocacy organizations in the United States (and elsewhere) in the past century. In 2005, MADD celebrated the 25th anniversary of its founding. Based on a national poll by the Gallup Organization in 2005, MADD is recognized by 94% of citizens. It is generally given credit for changing American and others country's attitudes toward drinking and driving. Since MADD's founding in 1980, alcohol-related traffic deaths in the United States have decreased from an estimated 30,000 to 16,694 in 2004, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). This article examines the growth of MADD since its founding and attempts to gauge its contribution to the public's understanding of the impaired-driving problem and to the reductions in alcohol-related highway deaths and injuries that have occurred in the first 25 years of its existence.¹

Origins

In May 1980, 13-year-old Cari Lightner was killed by a drunk driver as she walked on the sidewalk in her suburban Sacramento neighborhood. The driver, Clarence William Busch, did not stop, but when he was apprehended he was found to have a blood alcohol level of 0.20 percent—and previous drunk-driving convictions. He was, in fact, out on bail for a similar hit-and-run. Cari Lightner left behind two sisters, one of them her twin. The Lightners' story was horrifying but not unique—there were 27,000 alcohol-related traffic fatalities in the United States that year, 2,500 of them in California. However, in this case, the girl's mother, Candace Lightner, a real estate agent, used her grief to fuel a new grassroots organization dedicated to reshaping the public's perception of drunk driving. The name of the new group and the date of incorporation were borrowed from family members. Her sister suggested calling the group Mothers against Drunk Drivers, or MADD. The Guardian of Manchester, England, among others, noted the gender implications. The feminine aspect of the title was an entirely accurate statement of feminine anger against the chiefly male perpetrators, who included the lawyers and judges that coddled this behaviour.

¹ James C. Fell & Robert B. Voas. Pacific Institute for Research & Evaluation. Calverton, Maryland, USA.

MADD's mission was to convince society that driving under the influence was a serious crime, and the devastating results of the decision to drive under the influence were not "accidents." As for the date of incorporation, September 5, 1980—that would have been Cari Lightner's 14th birthday. The Guardian also noted the political implications of the word "Mother"—as American as apple pie. Still, the first couple of months were slow going. Later that autumn, Lightner persuaded California governor Jerry Brown to set up a task force. Two years later, a presidential commission was formed which recommended raising the minimum drinking age to 21 and revoking the license of drunk drivers. MADD was not the first organization of its kind in the United States—RID (Remove Intoxicated Drivers) had been formed in 1978—but it soon proved to be the most influential. It had chapters in 31 States by 1982. MADD's members who were typically parents and who had lost children to drink driving accidents, testified before lawmakers. MADD's pitch focused on these innocent children, and the media was sympathetic. In fact, Lightner's own story was told in a made-for-TV movie on NBC in 1983. The same year, MADD forged an alliance with Anheuser-Busch² to promote the then-novel concept of responsible drinking. The group was clearly making big waves in the beverage industry.³ In 1985 the name was changed from Mothers against Drunk Drivers to Mothers against Drunk Driving.

America's Most Liked Charity

Mothers against Drunk Driving (MAAD) have been called America's most-liked charity, though its familiar acronym suggests the rage that prompted its formation in 1980. The group's traditional mission has been to fight what MADD national president Millie Webb has called "*the most frequently committed violent crime in the nation*"—*drunken driving injuries and deaths*". In its first two decades, the organization has been credited with fostering a profound reduction in the number of alcohol-related fatalities. Along the way, it changed an entire society's attitude towards driving under the influence (DUI) and introduced terms like "designated driver" into the lexicon. MADD continues to work to lower number of drunken driving deaths, and it has expanded its mission to include prevention of underage drinking.

² Anheuser-Busch LLC is an American Brewing Company, Headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri. The only alcohol gift to MADD came from Anheuser-Busch. Reported to be \$175,000, it actually only amounted to \$50,000 in cash when the in-kind components failed to materialize. This support did not materialize until 1983, well after much larger (\$1m) and more crucial contributions were received from insurance industry leaders and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in 1981.

³ MAAD updated 30 August 2020. <http://www.maad.org>

Concept of Responsible Drinking

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Impaired-Driving Goal

MADD responded to the lack of progress over the last decade by setting a goal to reduce the percentage of drunk drivers in fatal crashes by 25% between the years (2006–2008). In 2003 (the last year of available detailed data when MADD established this goal 42,509 people were killed in traffic crashes in the United States. Drivers who were legally drunk were involved in 31% of those fatal crashes, resulting in 13,045 fatalities. By focusing on five key strategies MADD believes that rate can be cut by 25% from 31% to 23% over the next three years. If the 25% reduction goal can be achieved, 3,261 lives would have been saved in 2003, for example. MADD with its partners has proposed five strategies to meet that goal:

1. Working with law enforcement to promote highly publicized, frequent sobriety check points or similar enforcement methods in each state;
2. Working to achieve high levels of safety belt use in each state, including the enactment of primary safety belt laws in the 26 states that do not have such laws;

⁴ MAAD updated August 30 2020. <http://www.maad.org> / encyclopedia.com

3. Supporting the development and use of effective technology, such as alcohol ignition interlocks on vehicles to prevent impaired driving by DUI offenders;
4. Working to improve the DUI criminal-justice system performance and accountability, including the reinstatement of court monitoring by MADD volunteers; and
5. Promoting effective alternative transportation programs to prevent drunk driving. It remains to be seen whether these strategies will have an effect on the problem.

Underage-Drinking Goal

It is a mark of the growth of MADD since its origin in 1980 that, in addition to an impaired-driving goal; it has set a goal for reducing underage binge drinking (five or more drinks in a row for men and four or more for women in the past month). The objective is to reduce by five percentage points the 31% of 16 to 20 year olds who report binge drinking (*SAMHSA, 2004*).⁵ Although MADD supports all of the recommendations from the Institute of Medicine report on underage drinking (*Bonnie and O'Connell, (2003)*,⁶ MADD plans to focus on two strategies: (1) work with police departments to strengthen the enforcement of MLDA 21 laws and (2) support and ensure adequate resources for a national media campaign on underage drinking focused on the adults. Most alcohol obtained by underage drinkers is through adults older than 21 and, in many instances, the parents. To be successful in this endeavor, MADD plans to build on recent research funded by the *NIAAA (Grant & Dawson, 1997;*⁷ *Hingson, Heeren, Zakocs, Winter, & Wechsler, 2003)*⁸ demonstrating the impact of early onset of drinking on adult drinking and driving-and-drinking problems. More difficult still will be the reduction of binge drinking on the college level. Despite substantial efforts to reduce college drinking problems, *Hingson and Colleagues (2005)* estimated that each year 1,400 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die and 500,000 are injured from alcohol-related causes. In a more recent article, *Hingson and Colleagues (2005)* reported that alcohol-related injury deaths increased from 1,400 to 1,700 between 1998 and 2001, indicating that high-risk drinking at colleges and universities is increasing.

⁵ Substance Abuse

⁶ Bonnie RJ, O'Connell ME (Eds.). (2003) *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*, National Academies Press, National Subst Abuse, Vol. 9, pp. 103-110 duce and Prevent Underage Drinking, Washington DC.

⁷ Grant B. F. & Dawson D.A. (1997) *Age of onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the longitudinal alcohol epidemiologic survey*. J. Sust. Abuse. Vil. 9, pp. 103-110

⁸ Hingson R. *et al* (2003) *Age of first intoxication, heavy drinking, Driving after drinking, and risk of unintentional injury among US college students*. J. Stud alcohol. Vol. 64 (1), pp. 23-31

Consequently, there is still pressure from some college administrators and the media to repeal the age 21 drinking limit (*Seaman, 2005*).⁹ Bills to repeal 21 years of age laws have been introduced in the legislatures of Vermont, Wisconsin and Louisiana. MADD may find that a substantial effort will be needed to keep the Congress from rolling back the minimum drinking age. The organization that, when founded, was focused on the criminal drunk driver, has moved to make the reduction of underage drinking—the spawning ground for the problem—into one of its’ major objectives for the future. Thus, MADD may be taking on a problem more difficult than impaired driving.

Integration of Youth Programs into MADD Activities

Early support for the MLDA 21 law represented MADD’s first major step toward broadening its original focus on the criminal drunk driver. This commitment was carried forward in its strong support for the national zero-tolerance law. This law established a legal base for reducing the availability of alcohol and controlling underage impaired driving and also presented a challenge to MADD for the inclusion of youth in its activities, particularly in the areas of alcohol safety and enforcement of underage drinking-and-driving laws. A national organization of youth called “Students against Driving Drunk” developed independently. In the early nineties, the two organizations entered into discussions of the possibility of an amalgamation (*Wilkerson, 2003*).¹⁰ This did not occur for a number of reasons, but clearly a central issue was that the SADD leadership was uncomfortable with strongly supporting impaired driving as a crime. Thus, jail had a potential role to play in combating the public disregard of the drinking-and-driving problem before 1980. However, jail space is limited and the cost of confinement to the community and the criminal-justice system is high, as noted in a study of the California legislation requiring jail sentences for first offenders by *Kinkade and Leone (1992)*.¹¹ Although there is some evidence (*Zador et al., 1988*),¹² that jail is effective in producing general deterrence, that evidence is compromised by the fact that most state laws mandating incarceration provide for the substitution of community service due to the lack of jail space.

⁹ Seaman, B. (2005). *How bingeing became the new college sport and why it would stop if we lowered the drinking age*. Time. Vol. 16 (6) August 29:80

¹⁰ Wilkerson, D. (2003). *MADD History Presentation*. 1980-2003., Irving, TX.

¹¹ Kinkade P. & Leone M. C. (1992) *Probation & the Drunk Driver.: A cost of being MADD*. Fed. Probation. Vol. 56 (2) pp.6-15

¹² Zador P.K. et al, (1988) *Alcohol-impaired driving laws and fatal crash involvement*. Insurance Institute & Highway Safety, Washington DC

Further, there is no evidence that serving jail time reduces future recidivism (*Voas, 1985*).¹³ Consequently, MADD has accepted the limitations of jail for first offenders; although, it continues to support longer license suspension periods. However, MADD's position on jail sentences for multiple offenders remains unchanged. Despite its initial punitive focus, MADD also has come to support improved treatment programs for offenders as it has accepted the evidence that offenders, particularly multiple offenders, exhibit drinking problems *Wells-Parker & Williams, (2002)*¹⁴ and that court treatment programs are effective *Wells-Parker et al., 1995*.¹⁵

Punitive Versus Remedial Measures for Drunk Drivers

When their loved ones have been seriously injured or killed, the victims naturally demand severe sanctions for the offenders. An early goal of MADD public policy was to demand jail terms for first offenders as well as multiple DUI offenders. In the 1960s and 1970s sanctioning of DUI offenders by the courts was relatively lenient, even to the extent of avoiding license suspension in many cases. Appropriately, MADD supported more substantial penalties to strengthen general deterrence and to prevent convicted offenders from immediately getting back on the road. Thus, MADD played an important role in encouraging states to lengthen the periods of license suspension and to adopt ALS laws. The call for jail for first offenders and increased jail time for multiple offenders was more controversial. The jail sanction can be seen as having what *Ross(1984)*¹⁶ has called a short-term "general deterrence" impact on potential drunk drivers and a long-term "educational" component (*Andenaes, 1974*)¹⁷ for society as a whole that characterizes impaired driving as a crime. Thus, jail had a potential role to play in combating the public disregard of the drinking-and-driving problem before 1980. However, jail space is limited and the cost of confinement to the community and the criminal-justice system is high, as noted in a study of the California legislation requiring jail sentences for first offenders by *Kinkade and Leone (1992)*.¹⁸

¹³ Voas R.B. (1985) *The Drunk Driver & Jail. Final report No. DOT HS 761-806 for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Washington, DC.*

¹⁴ Wells-Parker, E. & Williams, M. (2002) *Identifying and interviewing with drinking drivers in various venues: A Research Review: Proc 16th International Conference on Alcohol, Drugs and Traffic Safety.*

¹⁵ Wells-Parker et al (1995). *Final results from a meta-analysis of remedial interventions with drink drive offenders addiction: Vol. 90 (7) pp. 907-926*

¹⁶ Ross H.L. (1984) *Deterring the Drinking Driver: Legal Policy and Social Control.* (2nd ed.) Lexington Books, MA.

¹⁷ Andenaes, J. (1974) *Punishment & Deterrence.* University of Michigan. Press Ann Arbor.

¹⁸ Kinkade P. & Leone M. C. (1992) *Probation & the Drunk Driver.: A cost of being MADD. Fed. Probation. Vol. 56 (2) pp.6-1*

Participation in Safety-Belt Campaigns

The prevention of impaired driving and the use of safety belts are two of the three most important driver-behavior issues related to crash injury (along with excessive speed). Early in its history, MADD's effort to keep on message was challenged by the issue of supporting safety-belt messages and particularly safety-belt laws. Many national organizations adopted safety belt laws as a central element of their programs and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) initiated programs to encourage states to adopt primary enforcement safety belt laws, so there was not a direct need for MADD to be involved. Even so, there are a number of possibilities for combined enforcement campaigns such as checking safety-belt use at sobriety checkpoints and detecting impaired drivers during night time safety-belt usage enforcement activities. Initially, some were concerned that this would dilute MADD's drinking-and-driving message, but, ultimately, these concerns were resolved by promoting safety belts as the best protection for potential victims against the drunk driver. This ability to assume other key safety measures within the MADD mission was probably an important factor in keeping the organization within the mainstream of the highway-safety movement.

Victim Services Goal

As indicated earlier, a major source of strength for MADD is its highly developed program of service to the victims of drunk drivers. Its Victim Assistance Program (VAP) had more than 1,200 trained victim advocates and, in 2004, assisted more than 31,000 victims and survivors of impaired-driving crashes nationwide, a 5% increase from 2003. *Marshall and Oleson (1996)*¹⁹ have recognized the program as "*filling a cultural void and providing a way for people to manage and channel their grief in ways that are psychologically healthy and socially constructive.*" *Weed (1987)*²⁰ noted that victim activists gain status and experience that facilitates their playing leadership roles-leadership that MADD has harnessed in building its local chapters (*McCarthy & Wolfson, 1996*).²¹ MADD has set a goal of increasing the number of victims served by at least 20% a year through 2008, an important objective to its continued growth.

¹⁹ Marshall M. & Oleson A. (1996). *MADder Than Hell*. Qualitative Health Research. Vol. 6 (1) , pp. 6-22

²⁰ Weed F. J., (1987) *Grass-Roots Activism & the Drunk Driving Issue: A Survey of MADD Chapters, Law & Policy*. Vol. 9, pp.259-278.

²¹ McCarthy, M.D. & Wolfson, M. (1996) *Resources, mobilization by social movement organizations: agency, strategy, and organization in the movement against drinking and driving*. American Sociological Review. Vol. 61 (6) pp. 1070-1088

Conclusion

There is considerable evidence that MADD has made a difference in the United States (and elsewhere) regarding alcohol-impaired driving. MADD has contributed to the public's view that drunk driving is socially unacceptable. MADD has played an important role in encouraging state legislatures to enact more effective impaired driving laws and has been a prominent player in landmark federal legislation. Because of these accomplishments, there are now official MADD affiliations in Guam, Puerto Rico, Canada, Sweden and Japan. MADD's best-kept secret is its service to victims. More than 31,000 victims were served by MADD in 2004 with emotional support, victim assistance, and court accompaniment. Currently, 41,000 of MADD's 67,000 active members, and an unknown number of contributors, are alcohol-related crash victims. Because the source of their motivation for the cause is direct experience, and not the varying waves of public opinion, they form the bedrock of the organization for the future. Since 1999, when it added preventing underage drinking to its mission statement, MADD has provided strong support for the enforcement of drinking-age laws, which unfortunately are in a very similar stage as was drunk driving in this country in the 1960s and 1970s—illegal but tolerated. That must change if long-term progress is to be made in reducing impaired-driving and other alcohol-related problems. MADD is attempting to meet this challenge, just as it did the impaired-driving problem 25 years ago. Finally, there is some evidence that a moderate intake of alcohol offers some health benefits, although it is also a well-established fact that too much of a good thing, or a good thing at a bad time can be quite dangerous. Alcohol is a major factor in motor vehicle deaths, and still is a significant causative factor in aviation deaths. Should you wish to imbibe then it would be wise to leave at least 12 hours between the “bottle” and the “throttle”.