



Public Opinion Research on Drug-impaired Driving

Summary

Prepared for Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada

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This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of Public Safety Canada. The research study was conducted with 2,193 Canadians in January 2022.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre Recherche sur l'opinion publique au sujet de la conduite avec les facultés affaiblies par la drogue.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The safety and security of Canadians is a priority for the Government of Canada. Drug-impaired driving is a major contributor to fatal road crashes, and young people continue to be the largest group of drivers who die in crashes and test positive for drugs. To address this, Public Safety Canada developed a national marketing and multi-media advertising campaign in 2017 to inform Canadians, particularly youth aged 16 to 24, about the dangers and risks associated with drug-impaired driving. The campaign included partnerships with key stakeholders (MADD, CAA, CACP, and Young Drivers of Canada), public communications and outreach, and paid media (advertising).

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the research is to examine current knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to the dangers and risks, as well as legal implications of drug-impaired driving, compared with the initial baseline measured in 2017. A key focus is on youth and parents of youth, given that youth are the primary target audience for the campaign. Specifically, the research measures:

- Awareness regarding drug-impaired driving, and knowledge of the risk associated with it;
- Attitudes related to driving under the influence;
- Awareness of the legal implications and laws associated with cannabis; and,
- Behaviours and actions taken by Canadians.

The results will highlight changes that have occurred among the target group and broader Canadian public since the start of the campaign in 2017.

Methodology

The survey is comprised of 2,193 completed cases, including 447 with youth who are 16 to 24, and 404 parents of youth (16 to 24). This randomly recruited probability sample carries with it a margin of error of +/-2.09%. The margin of error for each of the target groups is +/-4.9%. The sample source is an in-house *Probit* panel of randomly recruited Canadians. Ten percent of the sample was collected with cell phone only sample. Fifteen percent were collected by trained, bilingual interviewers, while the majority were collected through online self-administration. Appendix A presents further methodological details of the survey.

B. KEY FINDINGS

Behaviour

The large majority of Canadians (83%) know someone who has used cannabis and three in five (58%) have consumed cannabis at some point in their lives. Of respondents who reported cannabis use, nearly three in five (57%; consistent with the 58% reported in 2020 but a notable increase from 39% in 2017) reported they are a recent cannabis user, having consumed it within in the past 12 months.

Consistent with 2020 and 2017 results, over one-quarter (26%) of cannabis users reported they have operated a vehicle while under the influence. Nearly one in three Canadians also report that they have ridden in a vehicle operated by a driver who was under the effects of cannabis.

More than one in three (38%) parents of children ages 13 to 24 reported that their child has used cannabis. Most parents (86%) said their 16 to 24 year old has not driven a vehicle while under the influence of cannabis. Nearly six in ten, 59%, believe that their 13 to 24 year old has not accepted a ride with a driver under the influence of cannabis, although 32% are unsure. Three in four parents say they have had discussions with their 16 to 24 year old about driving high, although only 32% of young people 16 to 24 report the same.

Awareness and Concern for Risks

Most Canadians perceive the detrimental impact of impairment on drivers, with an increasing understanding that cannabis affects one's ability to drive. Nearly nine in ten (86%; consistent with 2020 and an increase from 81% in 2017) agree that using cannabis impairs one's driving ability. Four in five say that cannabis impacts reaction time and ability to concentrate and nearly two in three (67%) say that cannabis makes the user a worse driver. Alcohol remains a greater concern, however, with 95% agreeing that drinking alcohol impairs driving. Nearly one in four (24%) continue to say that driving under the influence of cannabis is less dangerous than driving under the influence of alcohol.

Over half (56%; and increase from 49% in 2020) of Canadians perceive that the rate of driving while under the influence of cannabis has increased since legalization, and most are concerned (41%) or moderately concerned (31%) about others on the road who are driving under the influence of cannabis. The most pressing concerns over driving under the influence include hurting someone else (72%), generally getting into an accident (50%), or having a permanent criminal record (34%; an increase from 29% in 2017).

Normalized Behaviour

More than eight in ten Canadians (82%) believe it is not acceptable for people you know to drive high and only 6% say it is acceptable. On the other hand, Canadians are split on the variation in social acceptability of driving impaired compared with alcohol, with 44% saying it is more socially acceptable to drive under the influence of cannabis than alcohol and a further 11% saying they do not know.

Over half of respondents (56%, a slight increase over time from 49% in 2017) reported that it is rare for people they know to drive under the influence, although 12% said it is common. One in three (33%) say they would be comfortable in reporting someone driving under the influence of cannabis to the police. Respondents appear slightly less comfortable now than in 2020 and 2017 when 37% said they would be comfortable reporting someone to the police.

Information about Cannabis-impaired Driving

The incidence of searching for information on the effects of drugs on driving ability remains relatively low, with just one in four respondents saying they have searched for this information. By a wide margin, health professionals are the most trusted source of information on the impacts of cannabis on driving ability, selected by more than half of respondents (55%), followed by law enforcement (25%).

Two in three Canadians are interested in learning more about the effects of cannabis on driving ability, followed by the length of time before it is safe to drive after using drugs. Canadians are also interested in learning about the effects of different forms of cannabis consumption (52%). Roughly two in four would also like more information about how the police test for drugs, the laws and penalties regarding driving while impaired, or their rights as a driver should they be pulled over.

Views on Legal Status and Implications

Nine in ten (89%) Canadians recognize that it is illegal to operate a vehicle while under the influence, fairly consistent with the 91% reported in 2020 and up from 83% in 2017. Four percent continue to believe it to be legal, but slightly fewer Canadians are unsure (seven percent) than in 2017 (11%).

Some Canadians are unsure about the amount of time a driver should wait before getting behind the wheel after consuming cannabis before it is safe to operate a vehicle. In fact, one-

third said they “don’t know” (34%, although less than the 43% reported in 2017). A full 44% believe it requires three or more hours (up to a full night of sleep), which has increased from 31% found in 2017.

Numbers have risen in terms of Canadians’ awareness that police can detect impairment from cannabis among drivers stopped at the roadside. Two in three (66%) believe that police are capable of determining whether a driver is impaired from cannabis, an increase from 63% in 2020 and 45% in 2017.

Just over one in ten (13%, a decrease from 19% in 2020) Canadians feel they are aware of general laws around cannabis and the legal consequences of breaking those laws, and a further 30% report they are somewhat aware. Follow up awareness of specific drug-impaired driving legal penalties is moderate with one in five (20%, a decrease from 27% reported in 2020) Canadians saying they are aware that penalties for driving while impaired from cannabis can include a \$1000 fine, loss of licence, or imprisonment and criminal record. Another 30% say they are somewhat aware, although 48% report a lack of awareness.

Two in three (60%) Canadians believe that impairment from cannabis and impairment from alcohol carry the same penalties, a decrease from 65% in 2020 but still an increase from just under half (47%) in 2017. Over one-quarter say they do not know.

Less than half of Canadians (44%) believe that penalties are strict enough to prevent people from driving under the influence of cannabis, although this is higher among young people 16 to 24 (59%).

C. NOTE TO READERS

Detailed findings are presented in the sections that follow. Overall results are presented in the main portion of the narrative and are typically supported by graphic or tabular presentation of results. Bulleted text is also used to point out any statistically and substantively significant differences between sub-groups of respondents. If differences are not noted in the report, it can be assumed that they are either not statistically significant¹ in their variation from the overall result or that the difference was deemed to be substantively too small to be noteworthy. The programmed survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

It should be noted that the survey asks a numbers of questions about behaviours that may have a tendency to exert social desirability pressure for respondents to underreport their use of

¹ Chi-square and standard t-tests were applied as applicable. Differences noted were significant at the 95% level.

cannabis as well as incidence of driving while impaired, for themselves and their teens/young adults². The primary purpose of the survey is to provide a baseline against which future changes in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours can be subsequently measured.

Results for the proportion of respondents in the sample who either said “don’t know” or did not provide a response are not indicated in the graphic representation of the results in all cases, particularly where they are not sizable (e.g., ten per cent or greater). Results may also not total to 100% due to rounding.

D. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed by:



Susan Galley (Vice President)

² Ivar Krumpal, “Determinants of Social Desirability Bias in Sensitive Surveys: A Literature Review”, *Quality and Quantity*, June 2013, Volume 47, Issue 4, pp. 2025-2047.