

# Unveiling the Consequences: The Impact of Drunk Driving on the Rising Accident

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## ABSTRACT

Alcohol-impaired driving remains a persistent public safety concern that contributes to road traffic injuries and fatalities. While national policies in the Philippines prohibit driving under the influence of alcohol, limited empirical studies have examined how local social practices, enforcement conditions, and community perceptions influence the persistence of this behavior in smaller urban settings. This study explored the experiences and perceptions related to drunk driving in a city in Misamis Occidental, Philippines. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed to capture the lived experiences of individuals affected by drunk-driving incidents. Twelve participants who had experienced such incidents as victims were purposively selected based on inclusion criteria such as direct involvement in alcohol-related road incidents within the past three years. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method to identify significant statements, formulate meanings, and generate thematic categories. Data saturation was achieved after the twelfth interview, as no new themes emerged. The analysis produced several interrelated themes: the growing prevalence and cultural normalization of drunk driving; alcohol accessibility and weak law enforcement; drunk driving as a major cause of road accidents; challenges in law enforcement and social attitudes; and community-based and policy solutions for road safety. The findings suggest that alcohol-impaired driving is influenced not only by individual behavior but also by cultural norms, enforcement limitations, and structural conditions within the community. Anchored in deterrence theory and social norms theory, the study highlights how perceived low risk of punishment and cultural acceptance reinforce risky driving behaviors. Addressing the issue therefore requires coordinated responses that combine stronger law enforcement, institutional support, and sustained public education on responsible alcohol consumption and road safety. The study recommends strengthening community awareness programs, enhancing sobriety checkpoint operations, and improving enforcement capacity through training and adequate equipment. These measures may contribute to more effective prevention strategies and promote safer road practices within local communities.

**Keywords:** drunk driving, road safety, alcohol-impaired driving, community perceptions, law enforcement, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

### Rationale of the Study

Drunk driving remains a pervasive threat to road safety worldwide, contributing substantially to preventable traffic deaths and injuries. Alcohol impairment affects key driving skills — including judgment, coordination, and reaction time — which significantly elevates crash risk at even moderate blood alcohol concentrations (BAC). A systematic review of alcohol's impact on driving performance confirmed that higher BAC levels impair perceptual and cognitive processes essential for safe driving, thereby increasing the likelihood of collisions and serious outcomes (Dong et al., 2024). Epidemiological research also shows that crash risk at BAC levels above legal limits is markedly elevated during nighttime hours, reinforcing the role of alcohol in severe traffic crashes (Johnson, 2024; Miller et al., 2024). These findings align with global public health evidence demonstrating that alcohol-impaired driving continues to fuel substantial mortality and morbidity across diverse contexts (Vichitkunakorn et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, deterrence theory posits that individuals are less likely to engage in risky behaviors when the perceived certainty, severity, and swiftness of punishment are high, whereas social norms theory emphasizes that behavior is shaped by shared cultural expectations and peer influences. These frameworks provide a useful lens for understanding why drunk driving persists despite legal prohibitions.

In Asian settings, the influence of alcohol on road incidents is similarly troubling. Studies highlight that drivers with elevated BAC — especially those operating motorcycles — are at higher risk of severe injury and crash responsibility, underlining the vulnerability of motorized two-wheel vehicle users where such transport modes are prevalent. Additionally, research from Southeast Asia underscores how regulatory environments and alcohol availability shape drinking and driving behaviors, suggesting that legal measures alone may be insufficient without robust enforcement (Assanangkornchai et al., 2026). Together, regional studies suggest that although legal restrictions on drunk driving exist, cultural practices and enforcement inconsistencies continue to undermine their effectiveness (Lin et al., 2022).

Within the Philippines, alcohol-impaired driving often intersects with social rituals and community drinking norms that blur the boundary between leisure and risky behavior. Although national data indicate high proportions of road traffic fatalities involve alcohol impairment, there is limited peer-reviewed evidence examining these dynamics in smaller urban centers. This gap is notable given the widespread use of motorcycles and the prevalence of shared drinking practices, which may exacerbate vulnerability to alcohol-related crashes. Moreover, localized enforcement patterns, socio-cultural attitudes toward drinking, and patterns of alcohol consumption remain underexplored, restricting the development of targeted prevention efforts (Seva *et al.*, 2023; Islam, 2024).

To address these gaps, this study seeks to develop a contextualized understanding of drunk driving in one of the cities of Misamis Occidental, Philippines by investigating socio-cultural influences, enforcement practices, and lived community experiences. By generating locally relevant evidence, the research aims to support more responsive road safety interventions, enhance policy implementation, strengthen public awareness campaigns, and refine data-driven strategies for accident prevention. Ultimately, the study aspires to foster safer driving practices, reduce alcohol-related crashes, and promote responsible alcohol consumption within the community.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study aimed to evaluate the prevalence, causes, and consequences of drunk driving in one of the cities in Misamis Occidental, as well as assess existing preventive measures and propose potential solutions to mitigate its effects.

Specifically, the study endeavored to answer the following questions:

1. How prevalent is drunk driving in the city, and what are the common trends observed?
2. How does drunk driving contribute to the rising accident rate in the city?
3. What challenges do authorities face in enforcing drunk driving laws, and what solutions can be implemented to improve road safety?

### **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of individuals affected by drunk driving, aiming to capture the depth and complexity of their perceptions and reflections. Qualitative inquiry was suitable for understanding human experiences within their social and cultural contexts, allowing for rich, detailed insights into the phenomenon. A phenomenological approach, guided by Colaizzi's method, was adopted to analyze the data systematically, ensuring that participants' experiences were described accurately and meaningfully.

The research was conducted in one of the cities in Misamis Occidental, a provincial capital in northern Mindanao, Philippines. The city's combination of urban development, coastal geography, and strong cultural traditions provided a relevant context for examining the social and behavioral factors associated with alcohol-impaired driving. Participants were selected purposively to ensure diverse perspectives and direct relevance to the phenomenon. Twelve individuals who had experienced drunk driving incidents as victims were included, with selection criteria requiring participants to be at least 18 years old, residents of the city, and directly affected by alcohol-related vehicular incidents.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a three-part framework that explored participants' backgrounds, experiences of drunk driving incidents, and reflections on community responses and preventive measures. Interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Interviews were conducted in participants' preferred vernacular to facilitate candid and comprehensive responses. Ethical considerations were strictly observed: participants provided informed consent, and their confidentiality and safety were maintained throughout the study.

Data analysis followed Colaizzi's phenomenological approach, involving systematic extraction of significant statements, formulation of meanings, and development of themes. Credibility was ensured through member checking, dependability through careful documentation of procedures, and confirmability through audit trails and reflexive notes. Data saturation was used as a guiding principle to determine sample adequacy. These measures ensured that findings authentically represented participants' experiences while maintaining methodological rigor.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Theme 1: The Growing Prevalence and Cultural Normalization of Drunk Driving**

#### **Subtheme: Drunk Driving as a Common and Accepted Occurrence in the City**

Participants consistently noted that drunk driving has become a normalized behavior within the community. Several respondents indicated that impaired driving is often perceived as routine. This finding can be explained through social norms theory, which posits that repeated exposure to a behavior within a social group increases its acceptance and reduces perceived risk. Empirical research supports this observation, indicating that social tolerance contributes to persistence (Miller et al., 2024). Similarly, international studies have shown that in communities where impaired driving is socially tolerated, individuals are less likely to perceive it as dangerous or punishable, thereby reinforcing risky behavior.

#### **Subtheme: Drinking as Part of Local Culture and Social Gatherings**

Participants also emphasized that communal drinking practices contribute to the prevalence of drunk driving. Informal drinking sessions and shared alcohol consumption during celebrations often create environments where individuals underestimate their level of intoxication before driving. These practices reinforce social norms that treat alcohol consumption as a routine aspect of social interaction. Studies on drinking behavior indicate that drivers frequently underestimate impairment after consuming small or moderate amounts of alcohol, which increases the likelihood of driving after drinking (Domínguez-López et al., 2025). When alcohol consumption is embedded in cultural and social practices, individuals may experience pressure to participate, thereby increasing the likelihood of alcohol-impaired driving. This pattern is consistent with global findings, where cultural acceptance of drinking behaviors significantly influences risk-taking on the road.

### **Theme 2: Alcohol Accessibility and Weak Law Enforcement**

#### **Subtheme: Easy Access to Alcohol Encourages Unsafe Driving**

Participants observed that alcohol is widely accessible through convenience stores, local establishments, and informal vendors. This accessibility was perceived to encourage drinking prior to driving, particularly during nighttime social activities. Easy access to alcohol increases consumption opportunities and reduces barriers to drinking before operating a vehicle. Evidence indicates that increased alcohol availability is associated with higher levels of alcohol consumption and greater likelihood of impaired driving incidents (Bui et al., 2025).

When alcohol is readily available within communities, drivers may find it easier to engage in risky behavior without considering the potential legal and safety consequences. From the perspective of environmental and routine activity theories, increased availability creates more opportunities for risky behavior, thereby elevating the likelihood of alcohol-impaired driving.

### **Subtheme: Inconsistent Law Enforcement and Lack of Resources**

Participants reported that enforcement of drunk-driving laws is often inconsistent due to limited personnel, equipment shortages, and insufficient operational resources among traffic authorities. As a result, sobriety checkpoints and breathalyzer testing are not conducted regularly, reducing the perceived likelihood of apprehension. Research indicates that visible enforcement measures, particularly random breath testing programs, play a critical role in deterring impaired driving by increasing drivers' perception of detection risk (Yu et al., 2024). When enforcement efforts are sporadic or limited, offenders may feel less constrained by legal consequences, thereby weakening the effectiveness of road safety regulations. This finding supports deterrence theory, which emphasizes that the certainty of punishment plays a more significant role than severity in influencing compliance with laws. International evidence similarly shows that weak enforcement reduces deterrent effects and increases violation rates.

## **Theme 3: Drunk Driving as a Major Cause of Road Accidents**

### **Subtheme: Accidents Involving Young Drivers and Motorcycles**

Participants identified young male drivers, particularly those aged 18–35, as the group most commonly involved in drunk-driving incidents. Motorcycles were frequently mentioned as the primary vehicles involved in such accidents, especially during nighttime social events. Research examining fatal traffic crashes found that alcohol remains a major contributing factor in road traffic fatalities and is frequently detected among drivers involved in serious accidents (Gjerde & Frost, 2023). Younger drivers often exhibit higher risk-taking tendencies and may be more susceptible to peer influence during social drinking activities, increasing their vulnerability to alcohol-related crashes. This observation aligns with international research indicating that young drivers are disproportionately involved in alcohol-related crashes due to risk-taking behavior and peer pressure.

### **Subtheme: Consequences of Impaired Judgment Due to Alcohol**

Participants emphasized that alcohol significantly impairs judgment, coordination, and reaction time. They reported that intoxicated drivers frequently overestimate their ability to control vehicles despite being under the influence of alcohol. This overconfidence often results in risky driving behaviors such as speeding, delayed braking, and poor decision-making. Experimental and systematic research confirms that alcohol consumption disrupts perception, cognitive processing, and motor coordination, thereby increasing the probability of traffic collisions (Dong et al., 2024). These impairments reduce drivers' ability to respond to sudden road hazards and significantly elevate crash risk. Comparable findings from global road safety studies further confirm that alcohol impairment remains one of the leading contributors to traffic injuries and fatalities worldwide.

## **Theme 4: Challenges in Law Enforcement and Social Attitudes**

### **Subtheme: Lack of Manpower and Equipment among Authorities**

Participants stressed that insufficient manpower and limited equipment hinder the effective enforcement of drunk-driving laws. Without adequate resources, law enforcement agencies struggle to conduct frequent checkpoints, monitor high-risk areas, or sustain consistent patrol operations. Policy research on drink-driving regulations indicates that stronger legal enforcement strategies, including lower blood alcohol concentration limits and increased monitoring, contribute to reductions in alcohol-related crashes (Portillo et al., 2024). However, such policies are only effective when authorities possess sufficient operational capacity to implement them consistently. International experiences similarly demonstrate that well-resourced enforcement systems are essential for achieving sustained reductions in alcohol-related road incidents.

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## **Subtheme: Social Tolerance and Cultural Attitudes Toward Drinking**

Participants further observed that community attitudes toward alcohol consumption often reinforce unsafe driving behaviors. In some cases, drunk driving is viewed as a minor issue or an unavoidable consequence of social drinking. When communities display tolerance toward alcohol misuse, drivers may feel less social pressure to avoid risky behaviors. Studies examining alcohol consumption patterns demonstrate that fluctuations in drinking culture and behavioral norms can significantly influence levels of alcohol use and related risk behaviors (Houston et al., 2024). Therefore, public attitudes play a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of drunk-driving prevention strategies. This supports social norms theory, which highlights how collective attitudes and beliefs influence individual behavior, particularly in the context of risk-taking activities.

## **Theme 5: Community-Based and Policy Solutions for Road Safety**

### **Subtheme: Stricter Implementation and Legal Reform**

Participants recommended stronger law enforcement measures, including stricter penalties, more frequent sobriety checkpoints, and stronger implementation of drunk-driving laws. Legal reforms targeting alcohol-impaired driving have been shown to influence driver behavior and reduce alcohol consumption associated with driving activities. For instance, policy evaluations indicate that stricter drink-driving laws and penalties can significantly reduce alcohol consumption and improve compliance with road safety regulations (Bui et al., 2025). Strengthening legal frameworks and ensuring their consistent implementation may therefore serve as effective deterrents against impaired driving. This finding reinforces deterrence theory, which suggests that increasing the certainty and visibility of enforcement can significantly reduce violations. Evidence from international settings likewise shows that consistent enforcement combined with strict penalties leads to measurable declines in drunk-driving cases.

### **Subtheme: Public Education and Awareness**

Participants also highlighted the importance of community-based education programs that raise awareness about the dangers of drunk driving. Public awareness campaigns can encourage responsible drinking practices and promote safer driving behaviors. Research suggests that combining public education initiatives with enforcement strategies can improve road safety outcomes by increasing knowledge of risks and strengthening community norms against impaired driving (Yu et al., 2024). Sustained educational efforts may therefore complement legal deterrence by fostering long-term behavioral change within communities. Globally, integrated approaches that combine education, enforcement, and community engagement have been shown to be the most effective strategies in reducing alcohol-related road incidents.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings indicate that alcohol-impaired driving in Oroquieta City has gradually become embedded in everyday social practices. Participants described drinking during social gatherings as a common activity, and this cultural tolerance often diminishes the perceived seriousness of driving under the influence. As a result, risky driving behaviors tend to persist despite existing legal prohibitions. The narratives further suggest that the normalization of alcohol consumption during social events weakens individual restraint and reduces awareness of the potential consequences associated with impaired driving.

The study also underscores the significant role of alcohol impairment in road traffic incidents within the city. Participants associated many vehicular accidents with drivers who operate motorcycles or other vehicles while intoxicated, often underestimating the effects of alcohol on judgment and reaction time. These observations highlight the continuing need for preventive strategies that strengthen public awareness and encourage responsible decision-making before driving.

Another key insight concerns the challenges faced by local authorities in enforcing drunk-driving regulations. Limited manpower, insufficient monitoring mechanisms, and inconsistent enforcement practices were identified as factors that reduce the effectiveness of existing policies. Addressing the problem therefore requires not only

legal provisions but also stronger coordination between law enforcement agencies, local government institutions, and community stakeholders in promoting safer road behavior.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study suggests that local government units, in collaboration with educational institutions and community organizations, intensify sustained public awareness initiatives on the dangers of alcohol-impaired driving. Educational campaigns that emphasize responsible drinking and road safety may help challenge the prevailing cultural tolerance toward drinking before driving.

Law enforcement agencies may also strengthen preventive measures through the regular conduct of sobriety checkpoints and monitoring activities, particularly during weekends and public celebrations when alcohol consumption is more prevalent. Consistent visibility of these measures can reinforce deterrence and discourage individuals from operating vehicles while intoxicated.

Furthermore, institutional support from national and local authorities remains essential. Providing enforcement units with adequate training, logistical resources, and modern breath-testing equipment can enhance the capacity of traffic officers to implement drunk-driving laws effectively and fairly. Strengthening these operational capabilities may contribute to improved road safety and a reduction in alcohol-related traffic incidents within the community.

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