

A qualitative study of disqualified drivers in Ireland: Pathways to disqualification, consequences and perceptions of road safety strategies

A report for the Road Safety Authority of Ireland

Dr Kiran Sarma, Chartered Forensic Psychologist

&

Katie Cox

Disqualified drivers have been ‘put off’ our roads having been detected engaging in the types of driving behaviours that are associated with an increased risk of road traffic collisions, injuries, and fatalities. These behaviours can include drink-driving, speeding, reckless driving, driving while holding a mobile phone and driving without insurance. This study has been commissioned by the Road Safety Authority of Ireland (RSA) to better understand the lives of disqualified drivers and their attitudes towards road safety strategies. It is envisaged that findings can identify avenues for novel road safety interventions.

March 2021

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the RSA.

Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	I
E.1.0 INTRODUCTION	I
E.1.1 METHOD	II
E.1.2 FINDINGS	IV
E.1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS	IX
AREA 1: TARGETING PERMISSIVE ATTITUDES	IX
AREA 2: ACCURATE ASSESSMENTS OF THE ACCEPTABILITY OF OFFENDING	X
AREA 3: ADDRESSING PRO-CRIMINAL THINKING	X
AREA 4: PROMOTING A MORE NUANCED UNDERSTANDING OF ‘DISQUALIFIED DRIVERS’.	X
AREA 5: RISK SPECIFICATION IN SERIOUS ROAD TRAFFIC OFFENDING	XI
AREA 6: MAKING DISQUALIFICATION ‘REAL’ FOR DRIVERS	XI
AREA 7: PUBLICLY NAMING DISQUALIFIED DRIVERS	XI
E.1.4 CONCLUSIONS	XII
SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	1
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 EXISTING THEORY AND RESEARCH ON SERIOUS ROAD TRAFFIC OFFENDING	2
1.2 THE IRISH CONTEXT	8
1.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND STUDY OBJECTIVES	10
SECTION 2. METHODOLOGY	12
2.0 WHAT APPROACH WAS USED?	12
2.1 HOW DID WE RECRUIT THE PARTICIPANTS?	12
2.2 WHO DID WE INTERVIEW?	13
2.3 HOW DID WE RUN THE INTERVIEWS?	15
2.4 APPROACH TO ANALYSIS	16
2.4.0 OVERVIEW	16
2.4.1 CODES & THEMES	16
2.5 ETHICS	17
SECTION 3. FINDINGS	18
3.0 ROUTES TO DRIVER DISQUALIFICATION	18
NORMALISATION AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE	18
STRESSORS PRECIPITATING OFFENDING	21
HABITUAL OFFENDING	23
RISKY PERSONALITIES IN SERIOUS OFFENDING	24

PRO-OFFENDING COGNITIONS	25
EARLY LIFE EXPERIENCES	28
3.1 CONSEQUENCES OF DISQUALIFICATION	28
DIFFICULT EMOTIONS - GUILT, SHAME AND MOOD	28
LOSS OF FREEDOM	31
RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY	32
ADDING PARENTAL STRAIN	33
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS ?	33
THE IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT	34
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	35
REFLECTION AND GROWTH DURING DISQUALIFICATION	36
3.2 ATTITUDES TOWARDS ROAD SAFETY SANCTIONS AND STRATEGIES	37
3.2.0 ATTITUDES TOWARDS CURRENT SANCTIONS (FINES & BANS)	37
DRIVER DISQUALIFICATION – IS IT FAIR?	37
DETERRENT VALUE OF DISQUALIFICATION	39
INSUFFICIENT DETECTION ACTIVITIES BY AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA	41
ROAD SAFETY ADVERTISEMENTS ESCAPED ME	42
RSA EDUCATION PROGRAMS	44
3.2.1 POSSIBLE FUTURE ROAD SAFETY STRATEGIES	44
IT COULD AFFECT MY LIFE IN THE FUTURE	45
I WOULD FEEL EVEN MORE ASHAMED	45
THERE WOULD BE OTHER BENEFITS	45
PUSHED OVER THE EDGE	46
INEFFECTIVE BECAUSE IT WOULD NOT INFLUENCE IN-THE-MOMENT DECISION MAKING	46
INEFFECTIVE BECAUSE NO SHAME FOR SOME	47
3.3 EXAMINING TRENDS ACROSS DIFFERENT TYPES OF DRIVERS AND OFFENDERS	48
SECTION 4: DISCUSSION	51
<hr/>	
4.0 KEY FINDINGS	51
4.1 KEY FINDINGS - PROCESSES LEADING TO DISQUALIFICATION	51
4.1.0 KEY PROCESSES AND THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY MODEL	51
4.1.1 KEY FINDINGS - CONSEQUENCES OF DISQUALIFICATION	53
4.1.2 KEY FINDINGS – WHAT WORKS AND WHAT MIGHT WORK	54
4.2 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	56
4.2.0 AREA 1: TARGETING PERMISSIVE ATTITUDES	56
4.2.1 AREA 2: ACCURATE ASSESSMENTS OF THE ACCEPTABILITY OF OFFENDING	57
4.2.2 AREA 3: ADDRESSING PRO-CRIMINAL THINKING	57
4.2.3 AREA 4: PROMOTING A MORE NUANCED UNDERSTANDING OF ‘DISQUALIFIED DRIVERS’	57
4.2.4 AREA 5: RISK SPECIFICATION IN SERIOUS ROAD TRAFFIC OFFENDING	58
4.2.5 AREA 6: MAKING DISQUALIFICATION ‘REAL’ FOR DRIVERS	58
4.2.6 AREA 7: PUBLICLY NAMING DISQUALIFIED DRIVERS	58
4.3 LIMITATIONS	58
4.4 CONCLUSIONS	59
REFERENCES	61
<hr/>	

Executive Summary

E.1.0 Introduction

Our roads have become safer places over the last 10 years, with marked reductions in fatalities from road traffic collisions over that period. In part at least, this reduction has resulted from positive changes in the behaviour of road users, with drivers increasingly aware of the importance of moderate and safe driving. This said, a significant proportion of drivers continue to engage in the most serious forms of road traffic offending including speeding, drink-driving and holding a mobile phone while driving. The best international evidence would suggest that such drivers, particularly where their offending is persistent, are at significantly greater risk of involvement in fatal and non-fatal road traffic collisions (e.g., Brar, 2014; Dickson, Wasarhaley, & Webster, 2013; Parrish & Masten, 2015; Purssell et al., 2010; Voas, Dupont, Talpins, & Shea, 2011).

At the most severe end of road traffic offending is a relatively small cohort of drivers who have been disqualified from driving due to either a single serious road traffic offence (e.g., drink-driving) or a combination of offences such that their licence is suspended. In Ireland these drivers are typically referred to as ‘disqualified drivers’. While there is a large body of literature on serious road traffic offenders, there is a lack of similar research focusing specifically on those who have been disqualified and which can complement the evidence base available to road safety stakeholders.

Recognising the potential value of research with disqualified drivers, the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has commissioned this study. The central aim of the research is to explore the lives and experiences of disqualified drivers and identify relevant ‘pinch-points’ in these stories that may be of relevance for prevention strategies. The specific objectives of the research are:

1. To explore the psychosocial processes that the drivers believe are linked to serious road traffic offending and driver disqualification. Such processes can potentially be used to inform road safety campaigns targeted at the general driver population, thus reducing offending on our roads.

2. Explore the consequences of disqualification for drivers. We know very little about the impact of driver disqualification on the lives of drivers, their families and friends. Such knowledge could aid in awareness-building campaigns.
3. Understand what road safety strategies 'work' and do not work, according to disqualified drivers. Disqualified drivers are uniquely placed to reflect on road safety strategies (e.g., fines, penalty points etc.); knowledge that is of importance to road safety stakeholders.

E.1.1 Method

We interviewed 30 drivers who had experienced a driver disqualification in the past 5 years. Participants had regained their licence at the time of participating. This ensured that a) they had an opportunity to reflect on their offending and b) they can receive an incentive for participating in the study, but which was not provided during the time of the disqualification. We conducted interviews with those who drive for work (n=10) and those who do not (n=20), and with drivers who had been disqualified for different reasons. We defined a driver who drives for work as one who receives 'mileage' for driving or are professional/commercial drivers (i.e. hold a Certificate in Professional Competence).

Of those interviewed, 70 percent (n=21) were male (30%, n=9 female). The average age of the sample was 28.6 at the time of the offence leading to disqualification. 53 percent (n=16) described their place of residence as being rural, with the remainder as urban (47%, n=14).

When asked about the offence leading to disqualification, some were disqualified for multiple offences and some for single offences. 60 percent (n=18) were disqualified for drink driving, for example, though one of these participants was disqualified for drink-driving and having no insurance or NCT. Five of the 18 disqualified for drink-driving were detected driving the 'morning after'. More than a quarter (27%, n=8) were disqualified having exceeded the maximum number of penalty points, with offences including driving with a mobile phone, not having insurance, speeding, not having a novice plate displayed and not wearing a seatbelt reported as offences here. A small number of drivers were disqualified in court for driving without insurance (n=3) and two were disqualified for drug-driving.

The period of disqualification imposed ranged from 3 months (n=2) to 60 months (n=1), with most disqualified for 6 months (n=12) or 24 months (n=9). Summary demographic and offence information for the sample is presented in Table E1.

E1: Summary demographic and offence information for the sample

	N	%		N	%
Gender			Offences		
Male	21	70	Drink-Driving (all)	18	60
Female	9	30	Drink-Driving Morning After	5	
			Drink-Driving Night Before	13	
Age Groups			Drink-Driving and other offences	1	
18-24	18	60			
25-31	4	13	Drug-Driving	2	7
32-38	2	7			
39-45	2	7	Penalty Points	8	27
46-52	2	7			
53+	2	7	Other	3	10
Duration of Disqualification					
3mths	2	7			
6mths	12	40			
24mths	9	30			
36mths	3	10			
48mths	3	10			
60mths	1	3			

The study was promoted online and through the mainstream media. Participants who met the inclusion criteria (disqualified in last 5 years, back driving now, and 18 years or older) contacted the team to participate in the research. They received a copy of the study *Information Sheet* via email and consented to participate by return email. Those interviewed received a €150 One4All voucher for participating in the study.

Due to the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, all interviews were conducted remotely either through Zoom or telephone. All were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. Each interview commenced with the researcher explaining the focus of the study and asking the interviewee to confirm that he/she consented to participate. While there were structural variations across interviews, typically the interviewees were first asked to provide some

demographic information including age, occupation, years driving, prior offences etc. They were then asked to describe the offence or offences leading to their disqualification. The remainder of the interview explored aspects of the lives of the drivers that may help understand how they came to commit the index offence(s).¹ Their attitudes towards road safety strategies were also probed.

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Full ethical approval for the study was sought and secured from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee at the National University of Ireland Galway.

E.1.2 Findings

A thematic map summarising the key themes emerging from the research is presented in Figure E1, below.

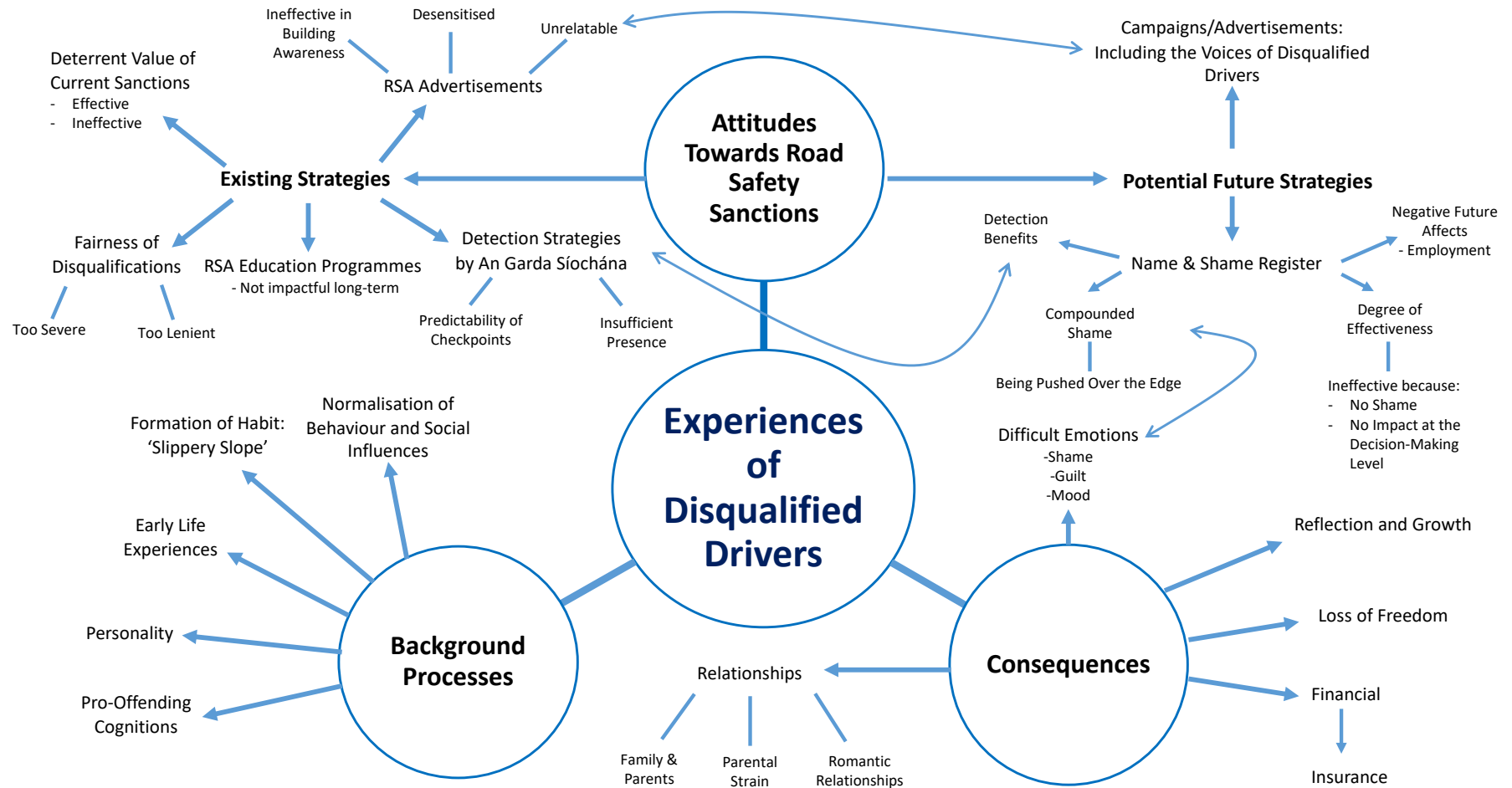
E.1.2.1 Processes leading to disqualification

Participants reported a range of factors that, they believed, contributed to their offending. Dominant among these were two key factors – a perception that many in the community viewed serious road traffic offending as common and acceptable (social influence) and a range of styles of thinking that can render offending legitimate (pro-criminal thinking). We argue that these two factors, and others reported in our interviews, can be usefully conceptualised within a social ecology model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which has been used elsewhere to understand serious road traffic offending (e.g. Musselwhite, Avineri & Susilo, 2014).

Social ecological models of offending focus on the interplay between different personal and contextual processes in determining behaviour. During our interviews, the majority of disqualified drivers reported enabling attitudes and beliefs within their communities, family and/or peers. This included a tacit or explicit acceptance of the legitimacy of drink-driving after a night out, of drug-driving, or speeding. There is a sense that these sources of influence in the drivers' macro-systems (wider community and culture), exo-system (local community) and microsystem (family and peers) normalised their offending behaviour rendering it morally justifiable.

¹ The term 'Index Offence(s)' here refers to the offence or offences that led to the disqualification.

Figure E1: Synthesis of the themes emerging



This may have led to the acquisition of a range of pro-criminal cognitions at the individual level that reflected the beliefs and values present in this system of social influence. Some drivers believed they were above the law, which suggests a form of thinking that is often referred to as 'entitlement' in criminology and forensic psychology. They also developed a plethora of excuses for their offending including that they 'had no choice', which is an example of 'mollification'. For those who had mixed thoughts about offending, in the moment decision making was heavily influence by cognitions that allowed them to circumvent their doubts including a tendency to think '#uck it' (so-called 'cutoff' cognitions).

With such pro-criminal cognitions (i.e., believing one is above the law and legitimising offending), an important barrier to offending is a belief that if they offend they will be caught. Yet many of the drivers interviewed reported 'super-optimism' - the belief that the risk of being caught or being in a collision was very low. In general, the range of pro-offending cognitions reported by the participants is in line with past research that implicated pro-criminal thinking in serious road traffic offending. Studies by Greenberg and colleagues (2004, 2005a), Bishop (2011) and Freeman and colleagues (2006), for example, identified mollification, super-optimism and entitlement in their samples of repeat offenders. There is also evidence that super-optimism, in particular, is implicated in persistent offending (Palmer & Hollin, 2010).

For some, offending became part of the repertoire of behaviours through a slippery slope process where behaviours occurred with more and more frequency. This commenced, for a number of drivers, very soon after obtaining their driving licence. The literature on the formation of habit in risky driving is relevant here (e.g., De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007; Lourens, 1992), as is the literature suggesting that building self-awareness of habit formation can lead to changes in habits such as speeding (e.g., Ruheena, 2020).

Personality traits may also play a role for some offenders, with a number of drivers interviewed suggesting that impulsivity, perceived difficulties with attention, and a tendency towards disregarding authority (and normlessness) was implicated in their offending. Again, this is in line with previous research on risky driving which has reported small but significant associations between some personality traits and risky driving among drivers in Ireland (Sarma, Carey, Kervick & Bimpeh, 2013) and abroad (Greaves & Ellison, 2011).

E.1.2.2. Findings – Consequences of disqualification

Disqualification had both psychological and practical implications for drivers. On a psychological level, almost all experienced some degree of guilt for their actions, and felt diminished in the eyes of others (i.e., felt shamed). Despite believing that many in society implicitly or explicitly condoned their drink-driving or other type of driving offences, once disqualified they encountered judgment and stigma. This was particularly, though not exclusively, evident among those disqualified for drink-driving.

Shame was a dominant theme in the interviews. Drivers spoke about the shame of telling friends and family. They felt that they had let their parents down. For those with young children, they could see the hypocrisy of their actions and the contrast with the messages they were trying to convey at home. They also feared telling romantic partners and colleagues at work of their offending, fearing that they would be criticised and further shamed. For some, in addition to shame, disqualification brought conflict with those around them – parents, spouses and children. This was most notable among younger drivers and the damage caused to relationships with their parents.

On a pragmatic level, many reported that they lost some of their independence. For those in rural areas with limited public transport options, they became reliant on the good will of friends, colleagues and family to get to work, training for sports and social events. Feeling like they were becoming a burden, some of the participants left work, stopped training and reduced their attendance at social events, leading to feelings of isolation. Children of parents disqualified from driving did not have a voice in this study. However, based on the accounts of parents it is clear that their lives too were impacted in terms of mobility, reliance on other parents for lifts, disappointment and embarrassment.

Reflecting on their time disqualified, almost all of our participants found benefit in their period “off the road”. For some it marked a time for reflecting on their lives – problematic drinking, drug-taking, busy and pressure-filled days and poor driving habits for example - and they took steps to address personal difficulties. This, they reported, led to personal growth. As discussed below, for many, but not all, with this personal growth came an appreciation for the need for robust road safety enforcement and sanctioning and an intention to become safer drivers.

Attitudes towards driver disqualification as a sanction for serious road traffic offending varied within our sample. When the drivers considered if the sanction was ‘fair’, some viewed it as too punitive and others as too lenient. Interestingly, the drink-drivers, and particularly those marginally over the limit and/or detected ‘the morning after’, often felt that the sanction was too severe while those disqualified through penalty points tended to believe that their sanction was appropriate. The sense from the interviews is that those disqualified through penalty points believed they had been given sufficient warning of the risk of disqualification (most accumulated points over time) and accepted that they could have taken steps to avoid this outcome. Morning-after drink-drivers, on the other hand, couldn’t accept that they were being treated the same as those tested immediately after a drinking session and who returned high Blood Alcohol Concentration levels.

Looking in more detail at the interviews, we also observed that those who reported that disqualification is “too harsh” are those who reported the most severe personal and practical consequences of their disqualification. It is not necessarily the disqualification itself that determines how severe the sanction is, but also the impact of the ban on daily living.

A separate issue to ‘fairness’, is efficacy in reducing offending. Here most drivers were of the view that the *experience of disqualification* is so severe that it deters *repeat offending*, but equally that the *threat of disqualification* had no bearing on their initial index offence(s) (because they didn’t appreciate the reality of being off the road at that point). This distinction arose across multiple segments in the interviews and is one of the key themes emerging from the study. Most of our drivers called for an awareness campaign that conveys to drivers who may be inclined to take risks on the road, but have not yet been disqualified, the real-life stories of disqualification and its consequences. Many wished they had understood this better before their index offence(s).

E.1.2.3. Findings – What ‘works’

Another theme that emerged in relation to enforcement and sanctions was a perception that there needs to more garda presence and detection activities around serious road traffic offending. The participants stressed that as long as drivers view the probability of being detected offending as extremely low, that penalty points, fines and disqualification will not reduce persistent offending. This is reflected, they further argued, in what they perceived as widespread use of mobile phones while driving, speeding and drink-driving.

Participants reported that Road Safety messaging around the consequences of risky driving had little or no effect on their behaviour before disqualification. They tended to see the events depicted, including serious collisions, injuries and fatalities, as not relevant – because it would not happen to them. Again, they argued that these campaigns needed to be made more relevant to offenders by depicting the story behind the individuals in those advertisement, as well as the drivers who caused the collisions.

Finally, when considering the potential value of novel road safety initiatives, drivers discussed the proposed register of disqualified drivers which has been discussed in the broadcast and print media. Views on the proposed initiative were mixed. Some drivers suggested that the threat of being placed on a register might deter offending. Others were clear that it would not. One participant suggested that naming disqualified drivers would help the Gardaí identify those disqualified but who continue to drive, and another suggested this would only work if the names were also published in the regional media. In general, the interviews neither supported or undermined such an initiative in terms of efficacy.

What was clear, however, were concerns expressed by participants that such a register could have unintended negative consequences for those disqualified. They feared the loss of privacy that could arise and the increased experiences of shame. They pointed out that the register could be searched by future potential employers, therefore affecting employment opportunities. For those who already had pre-existing psychological vulnerabilities, being named and shamed could exacerbate their distress and potentially lead to self-harm and suicide.

[E.1.3 Recommendations](#)

The central objective of this study was to present a body of evidence that could be used to identify potentially fruitful areas for road safety intervention. Based on the themes that emerged, we propose the following key areas for further consideration by the RSA.

[Area 1: Targeting permissive attitudes](#)

One of the key themes that emerged was the role of perceived permissive attitudes of communities, peers and families in supporting offending. To the extent that there *are* sections of communities with such attitudes, this then justifies on-going public health messaging that seeks to draw attention to the link between such serious offending and road

traffic collisions, injuries and fatalities. There may also be value in promoting an awareness of the potential role of perceived acceptance of dangerous driving in encouraging offending.

Area 2: Accurate assessments of the acceptability of offending

There was also a sense from the interviews that drivers didn't fully appreciate, until after their disqualification, that they would be judged harshly by some in their communities. This may point to an attentional bias where they overestimated permissive attitudes while they were offending. There may be value in measuring such attitudes in public attitude surveys and, assuming that a significant majority of the population do not accept that persistent driving violations and drink-driving is justifiable, using this information to encourage a more accurate assessment of how society judges these behaviours.

Area 3: Addressing pro-criminal thinking

Pro-offending cognitions are central to the processes behind serious road traffic offending. Such cognitions are a feature of all forms of persistent offending, and are routinely the focus of crime-prevention programmes. During such programmes professionals encourage offenders to consider the potential risks associated with their actions and overcome a tendency to underestimate those risks (i.e., super-optimism). They also encourage offenders to take responsibility for their actions, rather than externalising blame to others or context (i.e., mollification). While these approaches feature heavily in interventions for serious road traffic offenders, there may also be scope to harness these processes in public health campaigns.

Area 4: Promoting a more nuanced understanding of 'disqualified drivers'.

An important finding from the research is that the processes leading to disqualification vary widely. In the various testimonies we heard of multiple different routes into driver disqualification, even for specific types of offences. For some drink-driving disqualifications, for example, the offence arose through disinhibition and judgement error while intoxicated (being drunk precipitated the offence). For others, however, there was an underlying alcohol dependency. Here a background vulnerability (alcohol dependence) appeared to be the main risk factor in the offending. For others still, drink-driving was viewed as culturally acceptable in their areas, something that many people did at the weekend, yet was not spoken about or overtly supported. This points to the need for road safety strategies to understand the

complexity of serious road traffic offences like drink-driving, and develop interventions that have multiple facets sensitive to the varying processes involved.

Area 5: Risk specification in serious road traffic offending

A starting point in this work towards a more nuanced approach to serious road traffic offending, is to appreciate that the term ‘disqualified driver’ describes only the outcome – the loss of the licence due to serious offending. It tells us nothing of how the offence came about or how we can intervene to prevent offending in the future. If we accept this, then it makes sense to become more specific in our language around driver disqualification. Again, this resonates with the broader forensic literature which has long argued that key to effective risk mitigation is threat and hazard specification. It is also in line with lessons learned from road safety campaigns (e.g., Hoekstra & Wegman, 2011). The more specific we are about the behaviour of concern (morning after drink-driving, impulsive drink-driving, persistent drink-driving etc.) the better positioned we will be to be sensitive to risk factors for that type of threat and thus put in place effective mitigation strategies.

Area 6: Making disqualification ‘real’ for drivers

Reflecting on the far-reaching consequences of disqualification, those interviewed concluded that had they known what it was really like, they would have been more careful on the road. Drivers should hear these stories first-hand, they argued, to appreciate what disqualification really means. This is a theme that arose in all parts of the interview, including when discussing ‘what works’ in reducing serious road traffic offending. This points to the potential value of public health messaging that conveys the real-world consequences of disqualification.

Area 7: Publicly naming disqualified drivers

Views as to the efficacy of publicly naming disqualified drivers were mixed, with some arguing it might deter offending, and others arguing that it would not. There was greater consensus, however, that a register would have a host of negative unintended consequences for offenders. Those with underlying mental health difficulties are a particularly vulnerable group and the testimony provided in this study would suggest that the RSA should consider the societal ethics of the initiative (in addition to its possible efficacy) in its deliberations.

E.1.4 Conclusions

Research findings from this report are based on the reflections of disqualified drivers. Inevitably, in asking offenders how they came to offend, a whole host of justifications for offending are elicited. Some offenders blame their childhood, others situational stressors, and others still their peers, communities and cultures. To some extent, then, the entirety of their testimony in relation to their offences could be interpreted as justifications for offending.

Even if this is true, it does not diminish the value of the testimony. Justifications for offending are not necessarily manufactured realities (e.g., untruthful excuses), they are central to the process of committing an offence. Situational stressors may lead to problematic drinking, and in turn exacerbate the risk of drink-driving. Acknowledging this does not make the offence less serious, or render the offender less responsible for the offence. It just allows us to understand how the offence arose.

This is a point that almost all the offenders acknowledged in their interviews. When asked about their offending, they presented their stories, including their understanding of how they came to offend. However, during their disqualification almost all came to realise these experiences did not legitimise their offence or reduce their culpability.

The stories of disqualified drivers are valid, and they do highlight some 'pinch-points' that may be malleable to road safety intervention. Some of these have been highlighted in this report. Others will emerge from future research on this topic. This research could explore the lives of distinct groups of drivers not well-represented in this study including commercial drivers (e.g., HGV drivers, couriers etc.), drivers whose initial driving experience was acquired in another jurisdiction, older drivers, and those whose driving led to serious injury or death. There is also value in research with those convicted of drink-driving to determine to what extent this is arising due to underlying psychological and dependence disorders. Research could also integrate the disparate sources of information on disqualification in Ireland to provide a quantitative overview of the incidence of disqualification and prevalence within different categories of licence holders, gender, age group etc. Together with the evidence presented in this report, such studies will provide valuable evidence to prevent serious road traffic offending.

Some might ask about the ethics of conducting research with serious road traffic offenders, particularly where incentives are paid to ensure their involvement. We are sensitive to those whose lives have been so negatively impacted by the actions of dangerous drivers. The psychological and physical trauma, grief and anger can be profound and irreparable. We understand that giving serious road traffic offenders a voice in research, and incentivising their involvement, has the potential to cause distress amongst victims. Our primary motivation for the study, however, is not to just listen to the stories of disqualified drivers, but rather to do so with the applied objective of informing road safety strategies that can reduce such offending in the future. Without involving serious offenders in research, we run the risk of basing interventions on assertion and assumption, rather than evidence, and with consequences for the effectiveness of those interventions.

Section 1. Introduction and Overview

1.0 Introduction

Many jurisdictions in Europe, North America, Australia and elsewhere have witnessed marked reductions in road traffic collisions, injuries and fatalities in recent years. These reductions have been attributed, in part at least, to a change in driver behaviour achieved through a combination of formal criminal justice sanctions and driver awareness campaigns that have encouraged many drivers to adhere to driving laws. Despite these gains, there remains a significant proportion of drivers who continue to engage in the most serious forms of road traffic offending, including drink-driving, speeding or driving while holding a mobile phone. The best international evidence would suggest that such drivers, particularly where their offending is persistent, are at significantly greater risk of involvement in collisions (e.g., Brar, 2014; Dickson, Wasarhaley, & Webster, 2013; Parrish & Masten, 2015; Pursell et al., 2010; Voas, Dupont, Talpins, & Shea, 2011).

At the most severe end of road traffic offending is a relatively small cohort of drivers who have been disqualified from driving due to either a single serious road traffic offence (e.g., drink-driving) or combination of offences such that their licence is suspended. In Ireland these drivers are often referred to as 'disqualified drivers'. While there is a large body of literature on serious road traffic offenders, there is a lack of similar research focusing specifically on those who have been disqualified and which can complement the evidence base available to road safety stakeholders.

Such research could help us better understand the processes implicated in serious road traffic offending, and in doing so, point towards potentially useful road safety interventions. Recognising the potential value of research with disqualified drivers, the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has commissioned this study. Interviews were conducted with 30 disqualified drivers, during which each of the aforementioned topics were explored (i.e., pathways to disqualification, consequences, what works and what might have worked to prevent offending). The study complements an earlier systematic review of the evidence on serious road traffic offending (Sarma, 2019).

1.1 Existing theory and research on serious road traffic offending

As noted above, there is an almost complete absence of research on disqualified drivers in the international literature. The most relevant literature is that focusing on serious road traffic offending, including 'persistent offenders', 'repeat offenders', 'recidivist offenders', 'chronic offenders' and 'habitual offenders' (Nochajski & Stasiewicz, 2006; Watson, Siskind, Fleiter, Watson, & Soole, 2015). This literature base has been synthesised by this research team in an earlier review, and is revisited below to provide a context for the current study. It is important to stress that the vast majority of studies conducted in this area have focused on repeat drink-driving offenders, although a minority of studies have focused on other forms of offending, including thrill seeking, dangerous overtaking, close following and drug-driving (Begg & Langley, 2004; Begg, Langley, & Stephenson, 2003). It is unclear to what extent findings from the drink-driving literature can be generalised to other forms of serious road traffic offending.

Researchers in this area have suggested that there is something 'unique' or 'different' about repeat offenders that sets them apart from other non-repeat offenders (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2017). This uniqueness, they argue, manifests in the intractable nature of their offending, and the fact that traditional public health initiatives and criminal justice measures have failed to address the roots of their offending (e.g., Lenton, Fetherston, & Cercarelli, 2010). As such, while traditional explanations for offending may be relevant to repeat offenders, some additional explanatory processes must also be at play. In probing these deep-seeded processes, researchers have explored themes such as mental disorder, addiction and risky personality traits, and considered how these may leave the individual predisposed to, or may precipitate (trigger), offending.

In an attempt to understand serious road traffic offending, some researchers have looked to psychopathology, and in particular alcohol addiction, other drug addictions and psychiatric illness (e.g., Bishop, 2011; Carlson et al., 2011). Multiple studies from the US reported a relationship between 'alcohol dependence disorder' and repeat drink-driving offending, for example (Cavaiola, Strohmets, Wolf, & Lavender, 2003; Lapham, C'De Baca, McMillan, & Lapidus, 2006; McMillen et al., 1992; Robertson et al., 2016; Shaffer et al., 2007). In one study Shaffer and colleagues reported that almost 41 percent of repeat offenders met the criteria for an alcohol dependence disorder at some stage in their lives, based on diagnostic

clinical interviews with 729 repeat drink-driving offenders in Massachusetts, US (Shaffer et al., 2007). This finding resonates with another study from the US that used the same diagnostic approach, and which reported that 53 percent of repeat drink-drivers in Oregon met the criteria for an alcohol dependence disorder (Lapham, C'De Baca, McMillan, & Lapidus, 2006). Similar links between serious offending and alcohol dependence disorders have been reported in studies of drivers in Australia (Lenton et al., 2010) and Canada (Wickens et al., 2016).

There is general consensus among researchers that there is an association between alcohol dependence and repeat drink-driving. However, what is less certain is the nature of this relationship. Schell et al, (2006) propose that drink-drivers may have positive expectations about both the use of alcohol and the use of alcohol when driving, an attentional bias where the potential negative consequences of both are deprioritised (Schell et al., 2006). This might point towards a disinhibition process, where permissive attitudes towards drink-driving arise in the context of a tendency toward trivialising risk in the face of what is perceived to be an enjoyable experience. Such permissive attitudes were reported in a large-scale qualitative study of 182 drink-drivers in Arizona, Pennsylvania and Colorado (158 of whom had two or more offences) with much of this sample not believing that their drink-driving was endangering either themselves or others, suggesting that they could drive safely while intoxicated (Wiliszowski et al., 1996).

Miller and Fillmore (2014) focused on attention bias. They propose that drink-drivers may have a preoccupation with the positive effect of alcohol (Miller & Fillmore, 2014) at the expense of full consideration of the risks associated with drink-driving. Thus, assessments of the risks and gains associated with risky behaviour are distorted, leading to maladjusted decision making. It may also be the case that problematic drinking depletes the driver's ability to process information in the environment (neurocognitive impairment), and which may contribute to repeat drink-driving (Ouimet et al., 2007).

It is important to stress that the evidence does not support the assertion that dependence, in and of itself, explains drink-driving, with many drivers who are dependent on alcohol not engaging in drink-driving and many drink-drivers not having a history of an alcohol-related disorder (DeMichele et al., 2016). The picture appears to be more complex.

In an effort to better understand this complexity, researchers have looked to other forms of psychopathology that might increase risk of recidivism. Lapham et al (2006), for example, reported that 31 percent of 459 repeat drink-driving offenders had a lifetime history of major depression or dysthymic disorder, and 15 percent had a history of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The lifetime prevalence rate for any type of psychiatric condition (excluding substance or alcohol disorders) was 45 percent in another study (Shaffer et al., 2007).

In a comparison of repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders, McMillen and colleagues reported that repeat drink-driving offenders scored higher on depression, mania, and psychopathic deviance than first-time offenders (McMillen et al., 1992). Similarly, DeMichele et al. (2016) concluded that repeat offenders are more likely to have a history of treatment for psychological difficulties than non-repeat offenders. Nochajski and Wieczorek (1998) also published findings of their longitudinal study (32-53 months post the first conviction) that would suggest that measures of depression and anxiety may be predictive of repeat drink-driving offending.

Looking beyond dependence and disorder explanations there is a well-established body of evidence on the association between high-risk personalities and risky driving behaviour. Theoretically, it has been proposed that individuals with higher levels of sensation seeking, impulsivity and normlessness etc. are prone to seeking excitement (e.g., through reckless driving) and are less concerned with the consequences of offending. It is possible that this arises because some individuals require greater stimulation, or risk, to derive the same excitement response (i.e., they become sensation seekers; Couture et al., 2008). This is supported by research that suggests that repeat drink-driving offenders score higher on sensation seeking personality measures than non-repeat offenders (McMillen et al., 1992).

Other personality traits have also been implicated in repeat drink-driving offending. In the aforementioned study, for example (McMillen et al., 1992), repeat offenders reported higher levels of hostility than first-time offenders, and other studies have reported that repeat offenders score higher on a related trait, aggression, than non-repeat offenders (Begg et al., 2003). A recent study of drink-driving recidivism in South Korea reported that higher scores on the personality trait psychoticism, which measures a tendency towards aggression, impulsivity and being self-centred, was associated with multiple drink-driving offending (Kim & Lee, 2017). They also reported that being a repeat offender was associated with viewing

one's own behaviour as being 'all good' and to criticise others (as measured by the Lie sub-scale of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire).

Not all research has reported associations between personality traits and repeat offending, however. Schell and colleagues (2006) found no evidence of differences in sensation seeking, hostility or impulsivity across repeat and first-time drink-drivers and C'de Baca and colleagues also reported that personality features could not meaningfully predict those who do and do not go on to re-offend (C'de Baca et al., 2001). These findings are likely to reflect a key barrier to conducting research comparing repeat drink-driving offenders and first-time offenders. Typically, 'first time offenders' in these studies are those *detected* for the first time. Many will have a history of persistent offending and the main distinction between this group and repeat offenders is that the latter will have been detected more than once (as discussed by Schell and colleagues, 2006).

Another focus of the research has been on criminality, based on the proposition that drink-driving recidivism may derive from normlessness, poor judgement, and a tendency towards rule violation in general. Such traits, as with other personality traits, emerge from the interaction of both genetic influences and experience across the life-span. One study of drink-driving in Sweden, for example, reported that 37 percent of repeat offenders had a criminal history, compared to 12 percent of first-time offenders (and where drink-driving offending was based on official records; Hubicka et al., 2008). Similar findings have been reported in a study from Hawai'i, with Hallstone (2013) noting a strong positive association between repeat drink-driving and the extent of criminal histories of offenders.

Another study, from the US, reported that repeat drink-driving offenders were more likely to have a range of criminal history risk-factors including being younger at age of first arrest for any offence, younger at first conviction, a history of past alcohol or drugs-related arrest, crimes against persons and misdemeanours (Dugosh et al., 2013). Robertson and colleagues also reported that drink-driving recidivism over a three-year period was predicted by criminal convictions (in the 12 months leading up to assessment; Robertson et al., 2016). DeMichele et al. (2016) found that persistent offenders were more likely to have a criminal history (3 or more offenses), be less likely to use their spare time for prosocial activities, and to have a history of expulsions from school, compared to non-repeat, drink-driving offenders. Finally,

half of the sample in a qualitative study of 12 imprisoned male offenders with 5 or more convictions had a history of criminality (Carlson et al., 2011).

Pro-criminal cognition has been heavily implicated in persistent drink-driving. One study examined attitudes towards drink-driving and sanctions and reported that those who estimated the likelihood of being detected drink-driving in the future as being lower, were more likely to report an intention to reoffend again. They also reported that a lack of respect for the law was associated with greater levels of drink-driving (Freeman, Liossis, & David, 2006). This resonates with findings in a second study, which reported that greater frequency of drink-driving was associated with lower estimations of arrest certainty and lower perceived severity of consequences of being detected (Freeman & Watson, 2006).

Others have also reported findings that suggest that pro-criminal attitudes may play a role in repeat offending. Bishop examined rapid-repeat offending among Floridian drink-drivers over a 12-month period (Bishop, 2011) and suggested that pro-offending attitudes and aggressiveness predicted recidivism (in addition to substance abuse and dependence). Similarly, Greenberg and colleagues (Greenberg, Morral, & Jain, 2005a) conducted a longitudinal study into the link between moral and prescriptive beliefs (e.g. what is 'normal') about drink-driving, as well as pro-offending cognitions linked to the perceived risk of detection and punishment, and of being involved in a collision. Two years after administering baseline questionnaires, they followed-up with 182 repeat drink-driving offenders. They reported that permissive attitudes towards drink-driving at baseline predicted drink-driving at follow-up (a similar finding was reported by Reynolds et al., 1991). In a separate study of 273 drivers with multiple drink-driving offences, they found that higher levels of drink-driving were associated with lower perceived risk of sanctions and collisions, and more permissive attitudes towards drink-driving (Greenberg, Morral, & Jain, 2004).

As noted earlier, the literature on serious road traffic offending has focused almost completely on drink-driving. Notable exceptions are two studies that derive from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study (DMHDS; Begg & Langley, 2004; Gulliver & Begg, 2007). Both studies are based on the same dataset, rather than representing unique studies.

The DMHDS assessed participants from the age of 3, with sweeps over their lifetime completed through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Measures of personality

(Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (MPQ)) were administered at age 18 and driving-related questions were asked at age 21 and 26. Offenders were categorised as persistent where they reported risky driving (of a specific form) at both time points (i.e., risky for that particular offence at 21 and 26). Other collateral information gathered during the study addressed well-being, and drug and alcohol misuse.

Where drivers reported 'often' or 'very often' thrill driving (driving fast for thrills), speeding (exceeding 120 km/h on the open road), drink-driving or drug-driving, close-following or dangerous overtaking at either time points they were classified as 'risky' for that specific form of driving. If they were categorised as 'risky' for that behaviour at both time points, they were categorised as 'persistent' (e.g., persisting in driving fast for thrills). In both studies significant statistical models only emerged for male drivers, and females were excluded from the inferential analyses.

In the first study Begg and Langley (2004) reported that persistent thrill driving (among males) was predicted by low constraint,² high substance misuse, negative emotionality, higher aggressive behaviour, and cannabis addiction. Persistent speeding was predicted by low constraint and higher aggression. Models for other forms of risky driving were not significant.

The second study focused on specific aspects of personality implicated in thrill-driving and speeding (Gulliver & Begg, 2007). For males, higher levels of aggression and lower levels of self-control predicted repeat thrill-seeking. Lower scores for constraint, higher aggression, and higher levels of well-being predicted repeat 'driving faster than 120 km/h on the open road' (p. 378).³

Three key themes emerge from these studies. First, the findings point to the potential value of exploring personality in persistent offending. Both studies highlighted negative emotionality and low self-regulation in repeat offending – trait-like factors that are difficult to change through intervention. Second, across the studies, the findings point to the importance of considering gender differences in persistent offending. In both studies,

² Low constraint is characterised in the study as low self-control, low harm avoidance, low endorsement of moral standards and a desire for a liberal social environment (i.e. the opposite of a traditional environment).

³ Though not discussed in the paper, higher levels of well-being is linked to positive emotionality. Such individuals, according to Begg and Langley, have a happy and cheerful disposition, and tend to feel good about themselves and the future. Such individuals are less likely to assess risk optimistically.

significant statistical models did not emerge for female drivers. Third, it is also important to highlight that the researchers explored models of specific forms of risky driving, reflecting research that stresses that the risk factor(s) for one type of offence may be different to those for another (Sarma, Carey, Kervick, & Bimpeh, 2013).

In general, the literature on serious road traffic offending has pointed to the potential role of personality, pro-offending cognitions, attentional bias and psychopathology in explaining persistent offending. Yet findings are inconsistent and the generalisability of findings are undermined by the methodological practice of segregating those detected once from those detected multiple times and assuming that they are objectively different groups. As noted earlier, 'first-time' offenders are likely to have offended multiple times before their first detection and the difference between this group and 'repeat offenders' may be due to the chance of detection. A second limitation is that while studies sometimes report correlates of repeat offending, methodological limitations, and in particular the reliance on cross-sectional survey research, means that causal inferences cannot be proffered. A factor that correlates with repeat offending does not necessarily cause repeat offending. Finally, for some factors, like those related to mental health (e.g., depression and dysthymia), there are no clear theoretical explanation as to why such a factor would increase the risk of serious road traffic offending. The absence of a theoretical argument increases the chance that the apparent association is non-causal and occurs through a third variable such as alcohol dependence (i.e., alcohol dependence correlates with both serious road traffic offending and mental health outcomes).

1.2 The Irish Context

The current study was conducted with drivers disqualified in Ireland. There are multiple routes to disqualification in this jurisdiction. In order to provide context for the interviews reported in this study, the following routes are of relevance.

1. Uncontested Penalty Points: Drivers detected engaging in a range of offences by An Garda Síochána (the Irish Police force) or mobile speed cameras automatically (speeding only) have penalty points applied to their licence once the offence is not contested by the driver. This includes driving without a valid National Car Test (NCT) certificate (3 points), dangerous overtaking (3 points), holding a mobile phone while driving (3 points), speeding (3 points), and failure to display a Novice (N) or Learner (L)

plate (2 points). Some offences require appearance in court, including driving a defective vehicle (5 points) and driving without insurance (5 points). For drivers with a full driving licence, where 12 or more points are accumulated in any 3-year period, disqualification is automatic and for a period of 6 months. Learner and Novice drivers are disqualified on accumulation of 7 points.

2. Contested Penalty Points: Where the driver contests penalty points, this is then dealt with in court. If the court finds against the driver, then a higher tier of penalty points is incurred – 5 for driving a vehicle without an NCT, for example, and 5 for speeding. Again, disqualification is automatic once the maximum allowed penalty points is accrued.
3. Drink-Driving Disqualification: Drivers detected drink-driving and who do not contest the offence face automatic disqualification. Where the level of Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is below a threshold, the disqualification is automatic and does not require a court appearance. If above that threshold, however, a court appearance is mandatory. Disqualification periods range from 3 months upwards.

These routes into driver disqualification reflect the experiences of those interviewed in the study. A technical and legal summary of ‘types’ of driver disqualification in Ireland as set out in relevant legislation is set out in Table 1.

Disqualified drivers are required to surrender their driving licences to the National Driving Licencing Service (NDLS), who retain the licence until the period of disqualification has passed.

Table 1: Types of disqualification in Ireland (based on legal definitions).⁴

Consequential
Where a person is convicted of a specified offence (e.g., driving under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drug), the court makes a consequential disqualification order declaring that driver to be disqualified for holding a driving licence.
Ancillary

⁴ These distinctions are based on our review of the relevant legislation.

Where a person is convicted of an offence in relation to a mechanically propelled vehicle or the driving of any such vehicle or of a crime or offence in the commission of which a mechanically propelled vehicle was used, the court may, without prejudice to the infliction of any other punishment authorised by law, make an ancillary disqualification order declaring the person convicted to be disqualified for holding a driving licence.

Special

Where an officer of An Garda Síochána has reasonable grounds for believing that a person who is the holder of a driving licence is by reason of disease, physical or mental disability unfit to drive a vehicle (or is otherwise 'incompetent to drive'), such officer may apply to a Justice of the District Court having jurisdiction in the place in which such person ordinarily resides for an order under this subsection, and if the Justice is satisfied that such person is by reason of disease, physical or mental disability unfit to drive (or otherwise incompetent to drive), he/she may make the appropriate order declaring such person to be disqualified for holding a driving licence until he/she produces to the appropriate licensing authority a certificate of fitness or certificate of competency.

Penalty Points

When penalty points are endorsed on a person and, in consequence, the total number of penalty points standing so endorsed equals or exceeds 12, the person stands disqualified for a period of 6 months beginning on the appropriate date for holding a licence. **A lower threshold of 7 penalty points applies for novice and learner drivers.**

1.3 Introduction to the study and study objectives

This study is the first to explore the lives of drivers who have had their licences revoked in Ireland. A full description of the study methodology is provided in Section 2 of this report. We interviewed 30 drivers who had been disqualified in the preceding 5 years but had since regained their licence.

The central aim of the research was to explore the lives and experiences of disqualified drivers, and identify relevant 'pinch-points' in these stories that may be of relevance to prevention strategies. The specific objectives of the research were:

1. To explore the psychosocial processes that the drivers believe are linked to serious road traffic offending and driver disqualification. Such processes can

potentially be used to inform road safety campaigns targeted at the general driver population, thus reducing offending on our roads.

2. Explore the consequences of disqualification for drivers. As noted earlier, we know very little about the impact of driver disqualification on the lives of drivers, their families and friends. Such knowledge could aid in awareness-building campaigns.
3. Understand what road safety strategies 'work' and do not work, according to the disqualified drivers. Disqualified drivers are uniquely placed to reflect on road safety strategies (e.g., fines, penalty points etc.), knowledge that is of importance to road safety stakeholders.

Section 2. Methodology

2.0 What approach was used?

We used a qualitative research design to record the experiences of drivers who were recently (within the last 5 years) disqualified from driving in Ireland. The interviews were semi-structured to the extent that each interview probed the three key research objectives set out earlier, though there was scope during each interview for participants to introduce and discuss additional themes. The study coincided with the COVID-19 global pandemic and public health guidance at the time was that social contacts should be minimised. For that reason, interviews were conducted online or over the telephone, lasting from between 40 minutes and one and a half hours. Interviews were conducted by Dr Sarma, transcribed by Katie Cox, and analysed by both using Thematic Analysis (described later in this section).

2.1 How did we recruit the participants?

Interviewees self-selected to participate. A market research company, Behaviour and Attitudes, provided information on the study to participants in a sweep of their face-to-face survey in November 2019 (pre-pandemic). Those completing the market research survey were asked if they, or anyone in their household, had been disqualified from driving in the last 5 years. If they had, then the Behaviour and Attitudes staff provided that individual with information on the study and contact details for the authors of this report. Five participants were recruited through this process. In August 2020 we promoted the study during an interview on national radio (RTE *Drive Time*) and concurrently through a social media campaign. Again, the contact details for the researchers were provided, allowing members of the community to self-select to approach the researchers and express interest in the study. 25 additional interviews were completed following this second recruitment process.

Those who made contact with the researchers received detailed information on the study via email (a study *Information Sheet*) and were asked to provide initial information on the date of disqualification, offences that led to disqualification, if they drive for work, and to confirm they were now 'back on the road'. Those interviewed received a €150 One4All voucher for participating in the study.

There was no formal process for confirming that those interviewed had actually been disqualified. However, we would note the following:

1. The initial screening email sought information on the period of disqualification, date of disqualification, date of reinstatement of licence and offences that led to disqualification. This would have deterred individuals who had not experienced disqualification from seeking to enlist in the study.
2. The information provided to potential interviewees explained that the interview would be conducted by a forensic psychologist and would be in-depth. Again, this would have deterred respondents motivated purely by the incentive and who had not experienced disqualification.

2.2 Who did we interview?

We interviewed 30 drivers who had experienced a driver disqualification in the past 5 years. Participants had regained their licence at the time of participating. This ensured that a) they had an opportunity to reflect on their offending and b) they can receive an incentive for participating in the study, but which was not provided during the time of the disqualification. We conducted interviews with those who drive for work (n=10) and those who do not (n=20), and with drivers who had been disqualified for different reasons. We defined a driver who drives for work as one who receives 'mileage' for driving or are professional/commercial drivers (i.e., hold a Certificate in Professional Competence).

Of those interviewed, 70 percent (n=21) were male (30%, n=9 female). The average age of the sample was 28.6 at the time of the offence leading to disqualification. 53 percent (n=16) described their place of residence as being rural, with the remainder as urban (47%, n=14).

When asked about the offence leading to disqualification, some were disqualified for multiple offences and some for single offences. 60 percent (n=18) were disqualified for drink driving, for example, though one of these was disqualified for drink-driving and having no insurance or NCT. Five of the 18 disqualified for drink-driving were detected driving the 'morning after'. More than a quarter (27%, n=8) were disqualified having exceeded the maximum number of penalty points, with offences including driving with a mobile phone, not having insurance, speeding, not having a novice plate displayed and not wearing a seatbelt reported as offences here. A small number of drivers were disqualified in court for driving without a licence (n=3) and two were disqualified for drug-driving.

The period of disqualification imposed ranged from 3 months (n=2) to 60 months (n=1), with most disqualified for 6 months (n=12) or 24 months (n=9).

It is important to note that our definition of 'drive for work' was 'drivers who a) use their car for work, other than commuting to and from work, and receive 'mileage' from their employer for doing so or b) have a company car. This is a broad definition and means that many public servants who use their personal vehicles to travel to meetings, for example, could be classed as drivers who drive for work.

Table 2: Participant characteristics

	N	%		N	%
Gender			Offences		
Male	21	70	Drink Driving (all)	18	60
Female	9	30	Drink-Driving Morning After	5	
			Drink-Driving Night Before	13	
Age Groups			Drink-Driving and other offences	1	
18-24	18	60	Drug Driving	2	7
25-31	4	13	Penalty Points	8	27
32-38	2	7	Other	3	10
39-45	2	7			
46-52	2	7	Drives for work	10	33
53+	2	7	Does not drive for work	20	67
Duration of Disqualification					
3mths	2	7			
6mths	12	40			
24mths	9	30			
36mths	3	10			
48mths	3	10			
60mths	1	3			

Three of those interviewed were involved in a road traffic collision and disqualified due to circumstances surrounding that collision. One of these drivers was involved in a low-impact collision the morning after a night of heavy drinking. A second was involved in a high-impact collision the morning after. The third driver was involved in a high-impact collision while

drink-driving home from the local pub. In one of the high-impact collisions an ambulance attended the scene and conveyed the driver of the other vehicle to hospital.

All of the interviewees had valid driving licences at the time of driving. None have been disqualified since. One has accumulated 9 points. None of the drivers went to prison for their offences, but one reports that there is a “case still open for dangerous driving” against him. Seventeen returned their licence to the National Driving Licence Service (NDLS) on disqualification. All reported that they had not driven on public roads during their period of disqualification, with one driving on private agricultural land.

2.3 How did we run the interviews?

Interviews were run online via Zoom or over the telephone. All were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. Each interview commenced with the researcher explaining the focus of the study and asking the interviewee to confirm that he/she consented to participate. While there were structural variations across interviews, typically the interviewees were first asked to provide some demographic information including age, occupation, years driving, prior offences etc.

They were then asked to describe the offence or offences leading to the disqualification. The interviewer then guided the participants through events that immediately preceded the offence (i.e., focusing on precipitating factors), wider vulnerabilities that may be relevant (i.e., predisposing events) including mental health difficulties, influence of peer groups, personality etc. Where offending occurred over a period of time, the interview also explored factors that may explain the maintenance of the behaviour (i.e., perpetuating factors).

The interview then shifted focus to the consequences of disqualification on the life of the offender. This was led by the participant, where typically testimony examined the impact on personal and professional life, and on themes like shame, embarrassment and regret. Participants were also invited to consider the possible consequences of their offences for others.

Finally, the interview explored the participants’ views of road safety strategies and interventions. We also considered modifications to existing strategies (e.g., longer disqualification periods) and new strategies (e.g., publicly naming disqualified drivers) and how these might have prevented their offending if they had been in place at that time.

2.4 Approach to analysis

2.4.0 Overview

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was deemed the appropriate procedure for this study as thematic analysis enables both complex and conceptual interpretations of the data. Analyses was completed in phases, with each phase focusing on a specific research question (1. Routes to disqualification; 2. Experiences of disqualification; 3. What works or doesn't work).

2.4.1 Codes & Themes

For each phase, we reviewed the transcripts to become familiar with the data, generating initial codes based on the topics present in the text segments and re-reading the transcripts to become fully familiar with the data. Codes typically emerged based on the frequency in which they presented. The codes and transcripts were reviewed and revised in an iterative process as the analysis continued. A codebook was generated, which consisted of 4 primary codes relating to the research questions as outlined and consisted of 5 secondary codes for each primary code. This resulted in a total of 20 codes which were applied to the transcripts. Codes were collated to create themes, with relevant quotations highlighted that illustrate and support these themes. Thematic maps were also generated to help structure the themes relative to one another.

2.4.2 Intercoder Reliability & Agreement

As outlined in Thematic Analysis research, intercoder reliability may be achieved by assessing reliability based on a sample of the overall texts to be analysed (Krippendorff, 2004). A recommendation of 10 percent of total transcripts (i.e., 3 out of 30 transcripts) was adopted for this study, with transcripts chosen at random (Hodson, 1999).

The issue of unitization was addressed – a common problem facing researchers conducting Thematic Analysis (Campbell et al., 2013) – by sectioning segments of the text with brackets. Sectioning was based on thoughts and ideas expressed (Buber, Gadner & Richards, 2004), and were not specific in length. KC first unitized the interview transcripts, placing a code(s) alongside each unit. KS also received a copy of the interview transcript with units of text clearly outlined, but with the codes removed. This unitization allows for the exact same units to be coded in a consistent and reliable manner and eliminates a potential source of confusion when comparing the codes of two coders (Campbell et al., 2013).

Multiple methods are available to measure inter-coder reliability and agreement, but most were deemed unsuitable for this project (e.g., Krippendorff's α coefficient) as assumptions were not met for these statistical methods. Instead, interrater reliability was assessed using the method of Miles and Huberman (1984; 1994), wherein the number of times KS had the same codes as KC, was divided by the total number of codes used by KS. This was also conducted for KC, wherein the number of times KC had the same codes as KS, was divided by the total number of codes used by KC. It is important to generate intercoder reliability rates for both coders, as the total number of codes used by each coder may vary greatly (McAlister et al., 2017). The desirable outcome is to achieve a discriminant coding capability of 80% - 90% (Campbell et al., 2013). Overall, results indicated that intercoder reliability was 0.723 (72.3%) for KS, and 0.673 (67.3%) for KC.

Discussion of these findings revealed that most discrepancies occurred as a result of the different roles of the researchers. For example, KS delivered the interviews, and thus was more sensitive to the questions and responses from the participants, while KC coded strictly on the content of the transcript. Moreover, discrepancies could be explained by KC coding at a more granular level, compared to KS who primarily coded at a more macro-level.

After discussion of discrepancies, intercoder agreement was calculated using the same method (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Campbell et al., 2013) which is based on the number of coding agreements achieved after coders try and reconcile discrepancies. Overall, intercoder agreement was 0.963 for KS, who agreed with KC's codes 96.3% of the time. Intercoder agreement was 0.931 for KC, who reached a 93.1% level of agreement with KS.

2.5 Ethics

Full ethical approval for the study was sought and secured from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee at the National University of Ireland Galway. One of the ethical concerns for this report is that participants might be identifiable from the information presented. With this in mind, we have taken a number of steps to protect the identity of the participants. This includes using pseudonyms (rather than real names) and age brackets (rather than actual ages). Where testimony is very sensitive, we have taken the additional step of omitting pseudonym and age bracket.

Section 3. Findings

3.0 Routes to driver disqualification

A significant segment of each interview explored the processes that led to disqualification, with a focus on past experiences as well as experiences immediately preceding the 'index offence(s)' (i.e., the offences leading to disqualification). Where offending occurred over a period of time, including persistent drink-driving or accumulation of penalty points over time, then consideration was also given to factors that maintained the offending. The themes are presented below. We use acronyms to denote the index offence for each participant, and these are explained in Table 3.

Table 3: Acronyms used in the reporting of index offence(s) in this report.

DD	Drink Driving
Drug D	Drug Driving
DDMA	Drink Driving Morning After
PP	Penalty Points
NCT	No certificate of road worthiness (NCT Certificate)
NoIns	No insurance

Normalisation and social influence

A common theme in the interviews was that driving behaviour is strongly influenced by the attitudes and behaviours of those in the community, and those in peer and family systems.

Roan (25-31/DD), for example, focused on his late adolescence and early adulthood and the normalisation of drink-driving and other forms of road traffic offending in his social and community network. Roan lived in a rural area, where the local pub was a popular spot on a Friday evening.

You know, if you were in there on a Friday evening I would say about 70% of the people were leaving the pub and getting into the Jeep or the car, and making their way up the road.

He was exposed to the normalisation of drink-driving during that time where “the farmer goes for his two or three pints after having a busy night or busy day or whatever it is and it is kind of more of the social outing than anything else” and then drives home afterwards. This was socially acceptable in the community, and drink-driving was not perceived to have an associated sense of shame and stigma. The community justified drink-driving, he said, by blaming the lack of public transport or taxi options in the area, and because there was almost no Garda presence.

Colm (18-24/NoIns) suggested that liberal views on what constitutes unacceptable driving behaviour went beyond drink-driving. He was disqualified for driving without insurance and knows “quite a lot of people around the area that would be missing the cert on the windscreen”. Similarly, Conor (25-31/PP) spoke about the normalisation of speeding, particularly on motorways, and provided an illustration of the way that normative influences shape behaviour.

People are going past you in the fast lane at 140 or 150 or whatever, and you think ah fuck it - I'll just go (Conor, 25-31/PP).

Ross (46-52/PP) had a similar perspective on the acceptance and normalisation of speed in society.

The vast majority of people that go faster - the vast vast majority - are not penalised for doing it. I don't know, are we talking about 1% that actually get a ticket? If you drive the speed limit most days on the motorway, you are driving slower than the majority of cars and that means that the majority of cars are breaking that rule.

For many drivers the acceptance of road traffic offending within their communities was reflected in attitudes and beliefs within their immediate peer group. Ronan's (18-24/DD) friends regularly drive “the morning after” and don't view this behaviour as unacceptable. They would also sometimes drive immediately after consuming alcohol, and where the designated driver is not the individual who abstained from alcohol, but rather he/she who drank the least.

As I said, in a rural area it is not uncommon for people to hop in their cars, after a few... or I've seen lads on the night... a taxi system of whoever has drunk the least... let's hop into his and

drive home. Barry (31-38/DD) and Conor (31-38/PP) also reported that their friends regularly engaged in drink-driving and other forms of reckless driving. Louise (18-24/DrugD) echoed these experiences. She was disqualified for drug-driving and reported that driving having smoked cannabis was a regular occurrence amongst her peer group and in particular her closest friend. “She drove her car or I drove my car”, she reported, “and we were both under the influence of cannabis. I guess we knew better but it didn't stop us”.

Gerard (18-24/DD), who was disqualified from drink-driving after a night drinking in the bar where he worked, reported that there was a ‘barman culture’ where colleagues would drink after work and drive home.

A lot of people in work were doing it. The first day that I went to court one of the lads that I work with was getting his final day in court, before he started his suspension for drink-driving.

This testimony points to an acceptance of driving offending among some social groups that is completely at odds with what is acceptable within road legislation. Kieran (18-24/DD) captured this when he contrasted the legally allowed level of alcohol prior to driving and that acceptable within his peer group. Where legally you are restricted to very minimal levels of alcohol, Kieran’s peers set a more liberal threshold in their assessment of what was acceptable.

If you were just going down to the pub to have a few pints and then going home they wouldn't say anything... but if you were drunk, very drunk, then they would definitely stop you.

There were contrasting experiences of the normalising of driving offences among immediate family members, with some exposed to permissive norms and others non-permissive norms. Ronan’s (18-24/DD) brother regularly drives “the morning after”, for example, and Paul (18-24/PP), who was disqualified for speeding and holding a mobile phone while driving, reported that he grew up watching his grandfather driving “and he had a heavy foot as well”.

Kieran(18-24/DD) witnessed his father drinking and driving regularly in his teenage years.

I suppose I would never have done it if it wasn't normalised to me as such. Growing up, Dad was always at it like, just normal like.

Robert (18-24/PP) also observed his father drink-driving and engaging in other forms of risky driving growing up. “I seen him doing it when I was growing up”, he recalled. “That probably put it in my head”.

It also meant that when he lost his licence for accumulating points for speeding and not wearing a seatbelt he didn't worry about his father judging him. He was more worried about his extended family. When they would hear of his disqualification he “would find it embarrassing because it just makes you sound like a bit of scumbag”.

For others, though, their families completely rejected any justification for taking risks on the road, and in particular with regards to drink-driving. Roan's (25-31/DD) family, for example, were very against drink-driving and very upset at his disqualification for this offence. Sharon's (25-31/DD) mum was also strongly opposed to drink-driving, though this is a position that contrasted with attitudes in Sharon's peer group and broader social network.

My mum would never, never - even if she had one glass of wine or whatever she would never get behind the wheel of the car. So that was the attitude at home. But it was more the attitude in the community and amongst my own peers and my own group that was the problem – they shared the same mindset as myself.

Stressors precipitating offending

During the interviews the drivers also spoke about aspects of their lives immediately preceding the index offence(s) and that may have played a role in the offence(s).

A number of the participants felt that their lives at the time of the offending were “hectic”, with too much to do and in too little time. The sense from the interviews was that driving was occurring under situational stressors leading to poor driving styles. Ross (46-52/PP), for example, reported feeling “over-subscribed” and “overwhelmed” during the period when he acquired penalty points for mobile phone use and speeding. When driving he described using the time to make work-calls to maximise efficiency, and travelling as quickly as he reasonably could to create more space in his already frantic life. It was a case of “trying to make the trip as short as possible as well as using the time in the car efficiently”.

Fiona (53+/PP) also spoke at length about feeling stretched.

It would definitely be a theme for me that I would be stretching myself, if I could just get that email sent, if I could just do that... Just absolutely overwhelmed and under so much pressure.

She describes the events leading up to the disqualification as a “Domino Effect”. She believes in always keeping busy, and striving for perfection in her work. She says that this outlook is part of her personality. She admits to having little work/life balance, “just trying to do too much”.

Some of the participants reported acute or chronic life stressors, typically involving personal crises. One participant, for example, reported a traumatic period leading to the disqualification for drink-driving. The interviewee went through a relationship breakdown and had to leave the family home with his/her children. The interviewee reports being worried about financial issues and feeling overwhelmed.

I think that if my life wasn't in the shambles that they were in, the chances are that I would not have been drinking since 6 o'clock that evening.

Fiona (53+/PP) was also under significant stress when she was pulled over for being on her mobile phone, which led to her final 3 penalty points. Her relationship had also broken down and she had significant financial difficulties arising from the separation and the financial activities of her former partner.

I was under... now I'm talking about a financial situation where I might declare myself bankrupt Kiran. You know where I may lose my house, ok. Ok. Like I'm talking that level of pressure and none of it my making you know. None of it was my making.

Amy (53+/DD) reports that she was made redundant the month before she was caught for drink-driving and this played a role in her offence. “I was deemed unfit”, she said referring to the loss of her job. “I’m not able to work, work destroyed me... it just destroyed me”.

Both Colm (18-24/NoIns) and Anders (32-38/PP,NoIns) reported that they had financial problems leading up to the disqualification. Both were disqualified for driving without insurance, though for Anders this was just one of a number of offences. They claimed that they would have paid for insurance if they could have afforded to do so, and would not have driven an uninsured vehicle expect out of complete necessity. In Colm’s case:

“I had to weigh up the pros and cons. It was just me and my mother in the house and my younger siblings and my mother wasn't working. My father was gone and I was just trying to save the house more than anything because the children were in it.

For some, these stressors led to substance misuse and in particular problematic drinking.

So I was drinking far too much. I was using it as a crutch. So yeah it was just - anything that goes with those situations (Emer, 39-45/DD).

By the time another of the interviewees was stopped by the Gardaí for drink-driving, she had developed ‘severe drinking habits’ and classified herself as an alcoholic. She experienced suicidal ideation and felt that she was probably clinically depressed.

That night before I was in an awful way. I was crying, thinking that my whole life was gone, that my whole life was absolutely gone.

Sharon (25-31/DD) also felt that she had an unhealthy relationship with alcohol that was contributing to poor decision making across many areas of her life. She was unable to point to any specific reason for this, but concluded that it was clear that “it was a difficult time in my life, and a very chaotic period”.

Odran’s (18-24/DD, NoIns, NCT) use of drugs and excessive drinking led to conflict with his family and ultimately to his leaving the family home and living part-time in his car. During this time his peer group took on renewed importance and he worked hard to impress and be accepted by them. This led to even more excessive drinking, and driving after drinking.

Like at the time all my stuff was in the car and I had just started a new job. My mind was all over the place. I was half living with my girlfriend, with all my stuff in the car.

Habitual offending

Many of those interviewed admitted that they were persistent offenders and that behind the offence(s) that led to their disqualification was a history of repeated road traffic violations. Typically, those disqualified for drink-driving had a prior history of drink-driving, but had not been stopped by the Gardaí. Similarly, those who were disqualified through the penalty points system were also clear that they routinely exceeded the speed limit, used their mobile phones when driving, would not wear a seat belt etc.

Odran (18-24/DD, NoIns, NCT), for example, started drink-driving immediately on getting his driving licence (i.e., as a Novice driver).

I'd say I had the car for about 3-months and I'd say I did it about 10 times. Like once every two weeks or something.

For Gerard (18-24/DD) his drink-driving became a slippery slope where infrequent drink-driving led ultimately to regular drink-driving. "I don't think I could see myself just naturally stopping", he said. "I had tried but it was just a kind of circle I was in and I'd never get out of at that point in my life".

For individuals who engaged in 'morning-after' drink-driving, this habit was also persistent. Several participants admitted to driving the morning after a night out and doing so over a period of time. "A lot of people did it", Sharon (25-31/DD) reported, "and did so very regularly. They just didn't really say that they did".

It wasn't just those disqualified for drink-driving who were persistent offenders. Conor (25-31/PP) was quick to admit that he consistently exceeded the speed limit. It was not a conscious decision to speed, he argued, but just something that he did. Ross (46-52/PP) told us that his speeding developed during his early adulthood and had persisted since then. He hadn't changed in the intervening decades, he argued, it was the laws and enforcement of those laws that had changed.

I didn't change my behaviour. But all of a sudden I was getting speeding tickets. And unfortunately I still didn't change my behaviour and the points add up very quickly.

Risky personalities in serious offending

Some disqualified drivers believed that their disqualifications resulted, in part at least, from their temperament. Here they referred to underlying personality traits that left them susceptible to poor in-the-moment decision-making. Brian (18-24/DD), for example, described himself as "extroverted" and a "risk-taker".

I don't see the risks, I don't see the need. I think life is short and all this kind of craic like.

David (18-24/PP) was disqualified for speeding and using his mobile phone while driving. He described himself as a life-long risk-taker who did not respond well to those in authority telling him what he can, and cannot, do.

If they're telling me you need to do this and you'll need to do that - that's when I won't do it. That's just the way I have been always. Yeah that's the way I operate, but it's not like I want to operate like that. It's just the way I've always kind of functioned.

Another participant believed that her disqualification reflected her tendency to move quickly from task to task, with little time between tasks to think about what she was doing and how tasks should be completed. She queried if she may have attention difficulties, and potentially Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

I wonder are there elements of ADHD about me do you know what I mean. You know like the multi multi... You know I am a capable person, I am able to do my work and stuff but, I definitely, it would definitely be a theme for me that I would be stretching myself.

For these drivers, their difficulties adhering to road safety rules reflected difficulties in other aspects of their personal and professional lives. For Conor (25-31/PP), however, his tendency towards impatience while driving, leading to speeding offences, was not reflected elsewhere.

I don't mind waiting, I don't mind queuing or anything like that. And at work I'm fine, even with procedures, even if they're not that exhilarating, you are just hammering out a task.... so no not really. Just driving I don't know, I am just so used to it like.

Pro-offending cognitions

Those interviewed for the study were clear that at the time of their disqualification they knew that their actions – drink-driving, speeding etc. – were illegal and dangerous. They were asked how they justified their actions in their own minds. These justifications are important as they allow drivers to continue to drive dangerously and not feel guilty and embarrassed. In doing so, the justifications both permit offending in the first place and enable the offending to persist over time.

Most of those disqualified for drink-driving, including driving the morning after a night out, reported a strong belief at the time of the offence that they “would get away with it”. Often referred to as ‘*Super Optimism*’ in the forensic psychology literature, this style of thinking is associated with offending that continues over a protracted period of time, sometimes years, before the individual is finally detected and sanctioned. Odran (18-24/DD, NoIns, NCT), for example, drove his car without insurance or certificate of road worthiness for months before

being stopped by the Gardaí. Others engaged in persistent drink-driving, believing that the chance of being stopped at a checkpoint, or being involved in a collision, was very low. Martin (18-24/DrugD) believed “it won't happen to me. It is the same as cancer. It won't happen to me”. Similarly, Roan (25-31/DD) believed that the chance of being caught drink-driving was minimal because “where we live the visibility of guards is pretty minimal” and Paul (18-24/PP) said that he believed “it will never be me... It'll be grand”.

Peter (18-24/DD), having reflected on his drink-driving realised that his optimism was not well founded.

Pure stupidity thinking that I wouldn't get caught. That I wasn't that drunk... that I would be alright behind the car... I am only going 15-minutes up the road... I will never get caught. That was literally going through my head.

Other drivers reported a belief that they were in some way ‘above the law’, a form of thinking often referred to as ‘*entitlement*’. One of the interviewees, for example, reported that the Gardaí treated her unfairly before she was disqualified. “They were hounding me”, she said. When stopped by the Gardaí she had no insurance, no car tax, no L plates on her car, was driving a defective vehicle and was an unaccompanied learner driver. At that time, she said, she felt entitled to take some risks on the road acknowledging that she “played fast and loose with the rules”. David (18-24/PP) also tended towards entitlement at that time in life, believing he was “above the law” and resenting being told what to do by those in authority.

Some of the drivers articulated a series of excuses or justifications for their offending, both to enable the offence and to make it more palatable to them today. Such excuses, referred to as ‘*mollification*’, often took the form of blaming external sources or context for the offence or arguing that they had no choice except to commit the offence. For example, one participant blamed external factors for her actions. She had financial difficulties so could not make her insurance or road tax payments; she worked late at night and so could not expect a qualified driver to accompany her, she argued.

Others suggested that there were limited public transport options and so it was necessary, sometimes, to drive home after a night out. Barry (31-38/DD) drove home after a night out because there was no public transport “and it was only a short spin home for me”. Roan (25-

31/DD) reported that “it was always a last resort you know - It was never the case that the sun was splitting the stones and I decided to jump in the car. It was either lashing outside or there was no lift home you know. It would have been a very dark road”.

A number of the drink-drivers also reported engaging in drink-driving because they “had no choice”. One received a call from work at 7am asking for her to provide cover for a colleague who had phoned in sick. She left for work that morning knowing she might be over the limit. On reflection she knows that she should have ordered a taxi or asked a friend for a lift, but at the time she felt that “it was too early in the morning to get help” and that she had no choice. Another had a hospital appointment that morning and believed that she had no alternative but to drive to the appointment. “When I woke up the following morning and I realised I had the appointment”, she said, “I didn't actually have the time to cancel it. I'd be in the hospital as soon as I'd have cancelled”.

A common cognitive thinking style in our sample involved strategies to enable offending in-the-moment. Here pre-existing beliefs that offending is irresponsible, dangerous and may lead to sanction are temporarily suspended, allowing for an impulsive in-the-moment decision to drink-drive, drive without insurance, drive unaccompanied, use a mobile phone etc. Such cognitions are often referred to as ‘*Cutoff*’ in the forensic literature. The use of alcohol or drugs enables such cognitions, the most common of which is “#uck it, I'll just go for it” (Walters & Kaufman, 2005).

Just at the time it was a bit of a rash decision, it was drizzling and I said “feck it I'll drive up. It will save me having to walk up in the rain and having to come back down to get the car”
(Stephen, 18-24/DD).

Gerard (18-24/DD) reported a similar in-the-moment experience, deciding to “go for it” and drive home after a night of heavy drinking.

I come out of the pub on my own and it was either go left up to where the car was or walk right, and walk 15/20 minutes home. The car was a 3 or 4 minute drive, on a relatively quiet road that no one would really be on.

Early life experiences

When asked about the roots of their serious road traffic offending, just one driver focused on childhood. One young male driver reported that his mother had a chronic illness for much of his childhood, and he had little parental guidance during that time. He recalled having no boundaries or responsibilities in his life and developing an early lack of respect for authority and feelings of invincibility. This led to conflict both within and outside of school because “I wasn't really thinking about the repercussions of anything, because there was nobody there”. With the exception of this participant, the other disqualified drivers described their childhoods as unremarkable, and within the limitations of a research interview we were unable to identify adverse experiences that might suggest that serious road traffic offending was the externalising of early childhood adversity.

3.1 Consequences of disqualification

The second segment of the interviews focused on the impact of the disqualification on the lives of the disqualified drivers. Drivers reported a range of consequences, with the disqualification leading to emotions such as shame and regret, damaging relationships with family and friends, and hampering work and socialising.

Difficult emotions - guilt, shame and mood

Guilt, shame and embarrassment were common experiences for the disqualified drivers interviewed, though these emotions were particularly evident among those disqualified for drink-driving.

Amy (53+/DDMA), for instance, spoke about the sense of profound guilt, remorse and sadness for her reckless drink-driving.

You would want to be very, very, very devoid of feeling to not realise something, when you are caught for drink-driving, and think ‘God almighty if I killed somebody’.

Stephen (18-24/DD) remembered how foolish he felt for his drink-driving behaviour, labelling it as immature and childish. “I didn't really think”, he said. “I suppose I was a lot more foolish than I am now”.

Ronan (18-24/DD) recalls that after his disqualification that he was embarrassed that he had let himself down so badly. “I wasn't myself for a while, I definitely wasn't”. Others reported a similar sense of diminished self-worth. Stephen (18-24/DD) reported that “I saw myself as

slightly lower down the pecking order than most other people". Another driver recalls her experiences of having to come to terms with a damaged perception of herself, which has persisted for years.

I felt shit about myself. I was just embarrassed; I was embarrassed that it ended up that way. And like still, I tell my therapist about it now, I'm still embarrassed by that, I still carry these feelings of shame forward and she is trying to help me work through that. I am ashamed for that person even though that person is me.

Prior to disqualification the drivers had believed that there was tacit or explicit acceptance of driving offending in their community and peer groups. However, once disqualified they realised that not all shared these views. Members of the community made it clear to the drivers that their offences were unacceptable. They felt judged and experienced shame as a result, and again this was particularly notable for drink-driving.

Gerard (18-24/DD) reported feeling shame and being "judged" due to his drink-driving. He had the sense that many people think "disqualified drivers deserve it if they're going to do something stupid like drink-driving. People are very, and probably rightly, judgemental of it". Odran (18-24/DD, NoIns, NCT) also felt that he was being judged and shamed by some of those who learned of his disqualification, particularly older people. "I wouldn't [feel shamed] around people my age", he reported, but would feel like "a bit of a scumbag" around "an auntie or an uncle".

Many participants spoke about the shame experienced when telling family about the disqualification. Brian (18-24/DD), who was disqualified for drink-driving, reflected this theme, after reporting that he felt like a failure compared to the rest of his family.

Like they're saints like they wouldn't put a foot wrong anywhere. And also I have three older siblings and they're all saints too. So, it was kind of a kick in the balls that I was the one who was the fuck up.

Gerard (18-24/DD) felt particularly ashamed telling his father about this drink-driving offence, feeling like he had "let him down". Another young male driver reported a similar experience. His car was registered to his father and so when he was stopped for drink-driving, the Gardai

phoned his father. His father is a commercial driver who had always stressed the importance of road safety and he felt he had “let him down”.

For some of the drivers, the shame was less about being judged to have engaged in a highly dangerous behaviour, and more that they were caught. Ross (46-52/PP) was disqualified for speeding and holding his mobile phone while driving, but was “more embarrassed by it than anything else actually. It is the shame of getting caught out”. Barry (31-38/DD) reported a similar experience. His friends engage in similar risky driving behaviours and so there was less stigma attached to his drink-driving. He was embarrassed, though “that I got in an accident... it was just unlucky”.

For some participants, the disqualification led to other difficult emotions. One young male driver believes that he developed problems with both anxiety and depression after the disqualification, which have endured.

Mentally I definitely suffered a bit of depression over it, suffered a bit of anxiety over it. I am not sure that the anxiety ever left.

A young female driver recalls how she still struggles to come to terms with many of these feelings.

I was dealing with depression and anxiety for a long time, and I was getting flashbacks and shit, of things that I had done. Feeling anxious and upset and all those feelings come back to me now. Fear.

Emer (39-45/DD) reported that losing her license contributed to feelings of helplessness and loneliness, saying “I was traumatised. I was very lonely at the time”. Such feelings were amplified when the disqualification impeded practical family-life duties, as well as creating difficulties in finding employment.

I got very, very, depressed after it because it limited my life hugely.

Others felt withdrawn and isolated since the disqualification. Louise (18-24/DrugD), for example, reported that her family withdrew from her “because all of this shit seemed to be happening”. Her friends also withdrew, unwilling to make an extra effort to include her in events now what she was no longer independently mobile. Within a short period of starting her disqualification, she felt isolated and alone.

Loss of Freedom

The participants also spoke about the impact of disqualification on their lives from a purely practical perspective. Returning to Emer (39-45/DD), she recalled that the loss of her licence affected every area of her life.

...In relation to trying to get my children to school, in relation to trying to find work. Everything I needed to do I needed my car for because I would drive to shopping, the doctor, I drove to the two sets of schools for my children.

For Louise (18-24/DrugD), the loss of her licence “was a shock to the system, an absolute shock to the system”, that impacted on all aspects of her life and necessitated that she pre-plan transport options for the simplest of tasks. The reliance on public transport hampered Alan’s (18-24/DD) life as well.

Trying to get the bus to work was a bit of a pain because it was really depressing trying to catch the bus on time, and sometimes the bus didn’t even show up. Eh, and other times it’d be late, so I’d be late coming to work...or trying to meet someone somewhere.

Conor (25-31/PP) also stressed that disqualification had real implications for working life.

You lose your...it's not really a skill but...you lose the benefit when you're working, being able to get yourself around the place and, do you know, getting work done really. You are kind of handicapped if you can't, you know at work like.

Another area of life impacted by disqualification was social and recreational activities. David (18-24/PP) became fully reliant on his friends for lifts, who would “bring me up and down to college” and Stephen (18-24/DD) was similarly reliant. However, he was reluctant to burden his friends and decided to skip a lot of experiences that he associated with young adulthood.

In my opinion some of the most important years of your life are between 18 and 25. You have the freedom. You might not have a mortgage that kind of stuff. You have more time than ever to be with friends doing different stuff. I missed out on a lot of that due to my own stupidity.

Like Stephen and David, Martin (18-24/DrugD) also relied heavily on friends to transport him to training, matches and social events. He didn’t like asking for favours either, and so missed many of the activities he would otherwise have experienced.

I couldn't drive to training or drive to a match so I just kind of... I felt embarrassed asking people so I just gave up football. Just didn't bother going back.

This reliance on others left some drivers feeling that they lacked the same level of control over their lives as they had before the disqualification. For some, they no longer felt “in charge” (Emer, 45/DD) of their lives, and felt demoralised as a result.

Relationships with family

Those interviewed also spoke about the impact of their offending, and disqualification, on their relationships with close family. For some, it was their greatest worry and regret. “I let her down, and I let myself down, for sure”, reported Sharon (25-31/DD) on telling her mother about her arrest for drink-driving. Louise (18-24/DrugD) recalled how the disqualification led to a further deterioration in an already fragile relationship with her parents. They were already critical of Louise’s poor life choices and risk taking, and her disqualification left them even more disillusioned with her. “They were shocked and upset”, she said. “But they were like ‘sure what else is there?’ They were just sick of hearing me”.

Ronan (18-24/DD) also felt that he had let his parents down. Feeling that he couldn’t face them, he made contact with them less frequently.

They would try and ring me every two or 3 days because I wasn't contacting them as much... I felt like I had let them down, I was a disappointment to them.

Martin (18-24/DrugD) also spoke about avoidance. “There were a lot of times when I would actively try and avoid them”, he said. Alan’s (18-24/DD) parents were very upset about his disqualification for drink-driving, and he found himself in “a situation where we didn’t talk for like a week or something”.

I felt really shit about myself. But, eh... I knew I did wrong, but at the same time, I felt like... they kinda looked at me very differently after that.

For some participants the impact of their disqualification led to what they described as irreparable damage to the relationship with their family. Roan (25-31/DD) said that his disqualification was a major contributing factor in the erosion of his relationship with his father.

We wouldn't have that same relationship now you know. And I don't know if that is solely down to this [disqualification] but there's definitely a culmination of a few events that would have led to that but that definitely wasn't a proud moment for my dad.

For others, although their parents were upset and angry on hearing about the disqualification, they became supportive over time. Once the shock of the disqualification had passed, Brian (18-24/DD) recalled he found his parents very supportive. On reflection he realised that “they would always be by my side and support me with whatever happened. It was just I let them down”.

Adding Parental Strain

Drivers who were themselves parents recalled the shame and humiliation of having to tell their own children of their offence(s) and disqualification. Some, like Emer (39-45/DD) felt like a hypocrite telling her children that she had been disqualified for drink-driving. It set a bad example, she acknowledged, and undermined her moral authority in the family.

And then of course it caused arguments amongst my children. I was so embarrassed telling them. When you have spent all your life telling them to be law-abiding citizens, and then having to tell them that you've gotten into trouble in that way, it was not one of my finest moments.

Both Anders (31-38/PP, NoIns, Mob) and Fiona (53+/PP) also reported that it added a lot of stress and strain to their relationships with their children, not least because of the impact of the disqualification on the mobility of children. School lifts, sports training and other social activities took on added complexity, often requiring that children disclose the disqualification to friends and their friends' parents. Referring to the impact on a son in the home, one of the drivers reported that “it was awful, yeah, for both of us. Because he had to depend on my friends to pick him up from school and all that... I promised him it won't happen again”. Referring to the children in the household in general, the same driver recalled that “They felt bad... they felt bad...”.

Romantic Relationships ?

Disqualification also had an impact on intimate romantic relationships, particularly among the younger drivers interviewed. Gerard (18-24/DD) recounted how his driving ban became a

logistical nightmare for him and his girlfriend, as both became reliant on public transport and lifts from parents.

I do think that it put some strain on it. It was a 10-minute drive but trying to meet up and get a bus from my house and into town and then out to [other town]... the buses were taking me about an hour or an hour and a half. She didn't drive.

Marie's (18-24/NoIns) relationship also suffered due to her disqualification. Referring to her boyfriend, she reported that "both our worlds changed. It put a strain on the relationship... It was very hard especially being pregnant".

Some participants chose to conceal their disqualifications from potential dates and partners, primarily due to embarrassment, fear of being judged negatively or of being rejected.

When you go on a night out you go into [town], you drink, you meet a girl. You wouldn't advertise the fact that you were off the road. It was something that I would try and keep as quiet as possible, because it is just not nice (Martin, 18-24/DrugD).

Peter (18-24/DD) reported concealing his disqualification from his girlfriend's family, creating a web of lies to explain why he didn't have access to this car.

I didn't want any of her family knowing that I was banned off the road. So I had to come up with an excuse as to why I wasn't bringing my car.

The Impact on Employment

Almost all of those interviewed spoke about the consequences of disqualification for their employment. For those who drove for work, the impact typically included the loss of employment as happened Barry (31-38/DD), a professional driver. "I wasn't fired", he reported, "but I knew I had to leave. I had to leave that job anyway". Similarly, Colm (18-24/NoIns) had to leave his post as a vehicle mechanic following his disqualification.

It wasn't working out not having a licence as a mechanic because every car has to be tested on the road, and I couldn't go near the road with them and a colleague had to be there the whole time.

Some of those who did not drive for work also gave up employment due to disqualification. Marie (18-24/NoIns) worked until 3AM and couldn't justify asking someone to collect her that late at night for the duration of her ban, for example.

Where the disqualified drivers did not leave employment, there were still implications for life in the workplace. One participant drove for work, using farm machinery on public roads. He recalled how he became wholly reliant on his father to travel on a public road.

With the farm, dad had to do all the driving. I couldn't do any of it, which I hated because he's getting older and didn't want to be asking him to do it.

Alan (18-24/DD) had to deal with a long commute to work that left him fatigued and irritated during his working day.

I guess the two-hour period of being in a bus in a congested area, there was a lot of people around me, it'd kind of ruin my mood for the whole day trying to get into work.

Financial implications

When the period of disqualification ended, the participants approached insurance companies for cover. Most companies refused to insure them based on their disqualification, while others gave quotations that were multiples of the insurance that was being paid prior to disqualification. Barry (32-38/DD) was quoted €9000 by one insurance company, but eventually secured cover for €1400. This was on the low-end of costs of cover reported by the participants.

In fact, cover was prohibitively high for many of them and they had to take out cover as named drivers on the policies of parents or partners. Sharon (25-31/DD), joined her mother's policy, for example, and Peter (18-24/DD) joined his partner's policy and sold his own car "because we can't keep two cars on the road, we would never be able to afford that kind of insurance".

Anders (31-38/PP, NoIns) and Stephen (18-24/DD) gave up driving as they were unable to get an insurance quotation.

I've been ringing around trying to get insurance but no one really wants to look at you. Let's say anything over 2 years disqualification unless you are over the age of 30, they don't want to look at you at all.

Like other drivers interviewed, they have either considered or pursued a case through the Declined Cases Agreement. Under this agreement, where three insurance companies have

been approached and all have refused to provide a quotation, then the first company is obliged to provide a quotation.

Where disqualification led to the loss of employment, the financial implications were even more pronounced. One young driver lost her job and her home following her disqualification.

Then when I had to hand in my notice and I lost the job we were just struggling financially. We were killing each other for a couple of weeks [over financial stress] and then we decided that we had to give up the house and move back in with our parents.

Reflection and growth during disqualification

Disqualification disrupted the lives of all drivers interviewed in this study. Yet some also reported that they grew as individuals during that period. Being arrested, losing employment, and damaging relationships forced many drivers to reflect on their actions and aspects of their lives that led to those actions. Ronan (18-24/DD) reflected on the long-term positive impact the disqualification had, saying “I feel like I have matured, I feel like I respect alcohol more”. Similarly, Louise (18-24/DrugD) despite having a difficult personal time during the disqualification, concluded that she is ultimately happy that she was caught as she used that time to re-evaluate her life and “steer away from negative behaviours”.

I'm glad that it happened like I am glad that it happened because I don't think I would have learnt my lesson so even though it was shit that it happened, I am really glad that it did.

Participants caught drink-driving were often compelled to reconsider their relationship with alcohol, resulting in positive shifts towards more healthy habits. Amy (53+/DDMA) states that it was her disqualification experience that allowed her to fully address her alcoholism, stating that she hasn't “touched a drink since the incident happened”.

For Odran (18-24/DD, NoIns, NCT), being off the road gave him a chance to “go back to basics” and for Sharon (25-31/DD), she considered the roots of her drink-driving and developed a resolve to never drive after drinking again.

I've had no convictions since, And I have not been nowhere near - no alcohol like even if I had one beer like I would never sit back into the car.

Just one of the study participants appeared unaffected by the disqualification. Ross (46-52/PP) has accumulated 9 points since regaining his licence. He was the most persistent

offender interviewed and the only disqualified driver who seemed unable to moderate his driving style to reduce the risk of being disqualified again.

3.2 Attitudes towards road safety sanctions and strategies

In the final segment of each interview participants were asked about their attitudes towards the enforcement of road safety laws, and sanctions for violation of those laws, and what works and doesn't work in preventing offending. The themes that emerged are broadly clustered below into two sub-sections – one dealing with existing strategies and the second with approaches that the participants believed should be considered in the future.

3.2.0 Attitudes towards current sanctions (fines & bans)

Driver disqualification – Is it fair?

Reflecting on the consequences of disqualification on a personal and practical level, some of the participants argued that a driving ban is too severe a punishment for their offences. These drivers often resented the Road Safety Authority and An Garda Síochána, who they viewed as being punitive in their enforcement. They were also the drivers who were most profoundly impacted by disqualification.

Liam (18-24/DDMA) was disqualified for drink-driving the morning after a night out and reported that his friends and family “were angry that I got put off the road for such a low reading - for being barely over it”. Kieran (18-24/DD) also believed that the disqualification was harsh based on the blood-alcohol reading returned following his test.

I suppose at the time I would have thought that it would have been a bit hard to go off the road for 6-months on my first offense. Because I wasn't much over the limit when I got my results back. I wasn't far over so I could have thought maybe just a fine, not put me off the road straight away.

The consequences for participants of disqualification were serious and left some feeling resentment towards the authorities. Amy (53+/DDMA), for example, was disqualified for 2 years for drink-driving and felt that she had punished herself enough for drink-driving without the additional perceived punitive sanctions imposed by the state. “Sometimes I think the RSA have been very heavy-handed”, Amy reported.

I feel like I am being treated like a total criminal. And I feel like the RSA don't have a handle on what it is like.

A number of participants viewed as particularly severe the criminal record that comes with a conviction for motoring offences and which remains a matter of criminal record, they reported, for a period of 7 years in most cases.

Oh yeah and the other thing I am pissed off about is 7-years it stays on your record. I think that is ridiculous, I think that is way too much of a punishment, I really do. I can't see how that serves any purpose. You have done your 2 years, I was fined at the time - why prolong for another 7 years. I do think that is too much (Emer, 39-45/DD).

Ross (46-52/PP) viewed the sanctions for speeding and penalty points, leading to disqualification, as both too severe and arbitrary.

...the rules are capricious. That 120 is just a number, and I don't really think it represents truth in some way. It is more of an arbitrary thing and it is 120 because it is a nice round number.

Some participants viewed the sanctions for serious road traffic offending as being fair or too lenient. As Anders (31-38/PP, Nolns, Mob) put it, "I break the rules, so I pay the price".

Robert (18-24/PP) was disqualified for not wearing a seatbelt and speeding on three occasions and felt that the points and disqualification were appropriate. Odran (18-24/DD, Nolns, NCT), also believed that the system of penalty points is fair. The 6-month disqualification was "enough so you can learn your lesson", he believed. He also viewed his 3-year disqualification due to drink-driving as fair, arguing that drink-driving should lead to a longer period of disqualification than automatic disqualification through penalty points.

Odran's suggestion that drink-driving should lead to a longer ban than penalty points disqualification was echoed by others who called for a more discriminatory system. They argued that there is need to tailor the severity of the punishment to the severity of the offences, and that the current system of sanctions does not significantly differentiate more serious from less serious offences. Liam (18-24/DDMA) for example, didn't believe that it was appropriate that drinking and driving the following day, and drink-driving on the same night, are treated as the same offence.

I don't even agree with someone having one pint at 11, and then at 11:30 or 12 getting into the car - I don't agree with that at all. I am talking about being out until maybe 12 o'clock and having 4 pints, and then the next morning not being able to drive.

Amy 53+/ DDMA) also felt that her offence, of drinking and driving the day after, should not carry the same sanction as reckless drivers.

There are people going out at night-time doing doughnuts and driving recklessly and they need to be categorised. They cannot be putting us all into the same bunch.

Peter (18-24/DD) went further, expressing a belief that driving after lower levels of alcohol might be ok, but that “If you start having loads of beers and spirits and spending hours out that’s when you are crossing the line a bit”.

Roan (25-31/DD) used the same logic in arguing for differentiation in penalising speeding. Fines, he argued,

should be correlated with speed and be more difficult for drivers who are exceeding the speed limit in a massive way - like double the points if you are twice the speed higher or some range. It could be more - it could be harder on the driver. 3 points is fairly lenient in fairness because you could be going 200 kilometres on the motorway and get 3 points. The same man could be doing 135 or 125 and get done, and they get the same penalty.

Deterrent value of disqualification

In addition to considering how fair driver bans are, the participants also considered the question: ‘Does disqualification work in deterring offending?’. For many drivers, disqualification works in preventing recidivism – having been through the difficult process of disqualification, they have formed the intention to adhere to the road safety laws and not go through such a difficult experience again. Ronan (18-24/DD), for example, reported that “I respect alcohol more... and I am more aware of the consequences.... Yeah my outlook (on drink-driving) has changed”.

For David (18-24/PP), disqualification has made him reappraise his assessment of the probability of being detected speeding. Whereas in the past he underestimated the probability of being detected speeding

now I'm anticipating guards everywhere. And great these days to roll up to a checkpoint with your tax and NCT and insurance, doing the correct speed. But I'm just anticipating - Even going up to Dublin to the office when the virus [COVID-19] was at a low ebb, and I go up and

get a hotel, and on the way up I'd just be doing the correct speed limit with the aid of the limiter [referring to speed limiting feature in his private car].

Robert (18-24/PP) also moderated his driving style to reduce the chance of accruing penalty points. Robert describes himself as being more “aware” on the road since his disqualification, and says he is “never going to chance anything again” in terms of reckless driving.

When asked why they believed disqualification was a deterrent to re-offending, many pointed to the wider impact of disqualification on their lives.

The impact on my life definitely - I think that everybody knows that you were going to get a fine and get x amount off the road but again that is not a deterrent - for me. The long-lasting impacts that result from being disqualified are a far greater deterrent than any legal punishment (Sharon, 25-31/DD).

Sharon, like many of the other drivers interviewed, did not fully appreciate how profound a sanction disqualification was until she experienced it. She believes that drivers need to hear the life stories of disqualified drivers and “how disqualification impacted them because this resonates and you remember it much better” than simply being told you could be “off the road”. Alan (18-24/DD) also stated that disqualification was a strong deterrent to repeat offending. Being ‘off the road’ had a major impact on his life. Like Sharon, he hadn’t thought about the consequences of being disqualified until he experienced them first-hand.

Not everyone accepted that disqualification ‘works’. Conor (25-31/PP), who was disqualified for offences that included driving while holding a mobile phone, argued that detection and enforcement of this offence is insufficient to adequately deter drivers. He suggested that a technological solution may be the best way to address the offence.

It's a lost cause... It is ridiculously common and I don't know how you would stop it. I don't know if they could have something that would turn off your phone or have something that would put your phone into car mode. That's technology that's just going to run rampant anyway. I see people on their motorbikes on the phone and everything.

Ross (46-52/PP) was also particularly negative about the deterrent value of driver disqualification, which he described as being a ‘minor inconvenience’ for drivers who live in urban environments well-served by public transport. He has accumulated a further 9 penalty

points for speeding since regaining his licence and is once again at high risk of disqualification.

I will get another ticket if I don't change my ways entirely. It is not the end of the world what can I say. I don't want that to happen, I'm trying to avoid it. It's not like I'm going to have to go to jail or something.

He suggested that a more fruitful way of targeting road traffic offending was to 'gamify' the driving experience with a system of rewards for positive driving behaviour and more punitive monetary fines for offences.

If tickets cost €1,000 that would be a big disincentive. There could also be things that the government could put in place that would disincentivise me, or incentivise me to follow the road rules.

Kieran (18-24/DD) also believed that the current sanctions were insufficient to deter offending. Disqualification periods of 6 months, he believed, were ineffective.

"Disqualification should be for a period of 2 years, and take effect immediately" he argued.

Robert (18-24/PP) was also of the view that sanctions were too lenient.

Like it is strong yeah but it probably isn't strong enough. You still do find a lot of people being repeat offenders. Like even people who get caught and convicted you still find people getting done again, which is disgraceful like.

Multiple participants stated that no current sanctions would have acted as an effective deterrent, apart from physically removing their keys from them – "Apart from physically taking keys off me I don't know. Yeah I don't believe there can be [an effective deterrent], I don't think there is" (Gerard; 18-24/DD).

Insufficient detection activities by An Garda Síochána

As discussed above, participants who were disqualified for drink-driving were almost unanimous in reporting that prior to being disqualified they believed that the chance of being stopped and tested by a member of An Garda Síochána was remote. Peter (18-24/DD), for example, felt that Garda checkpoints were too predictable in terms of time and location.

It's like a speed camera van. A speed camera van is always in the same position on that road no matter what. So you just know. Had there been more checkpoints spread out across the

place you wouldn't know where you would actually meet them and it wouldn't be the safest bet to actually drive... That would be one of the main reasons why I decided to drink-drive.

Similarly, Martin (18-24/DrugD), felt that the chances of being stopped and tested by An Garda Síochána was very small.

We drive around from A to B all the time, but you never get stopped at a checkpoint. I live very close to XXXXX city maybe 7 mins outside XXXXX city, and I see checkpoints maybe twice a year in a city that has a flowing pub trade. And I live across from a pub. I never see a checkpoint anywhere near it.

Ross (46-52/PP) estimated that he could enjoy the thrill of driving fast and taking other risks in his car as (he believed that) the chances of being detected was 1 in 100.

Honestly I don't know... to me that feels like a pretty good deal. The 99 times of getting those warm fuzzies and having extra time in my day versus the one time of having to pay and getting points on my licence.

Road safety advertisements escaped me

While the drivers interviewed felt that road safety advertisements have encouraged safe driving practices for many drivers, there was consensus that they did not work for them.

Ronan (18-24/DD) remembers the campaigns growing up, but wasn't sure that they ever increased his awareness of the risk of dangerous driving.

The ads have been there since I was a kid and we've always been told [to drive carefully and not take risks] but nonetheless, it escaped me on a couple of occasions and I paid the price. And these ads obviously there to raise awareness and it's great that they're there.

This resonates with Brian's (18-24/DD) observation that the advertisements "clearly work for the majority of people in this world but it escaped me... it seems to have escaped my awareness". Ross (46-52/PP) watches the adverts, but they don't work on him "the way that I believe the creators hope it will work". He remembers one "beautiful" ad, but focused on its cinematic qualities rather than it having an impact on driving behaviour.

Others felt that they became desensitised to the advertisements over time, resulting in a lack of impact "like smokers looking at the warning on the front of a box of cigarettes" (Conor, 32-

38/PP). Conor actively avoids these advertisements now, “the song ‘body to body’ comes on, I just change channel”.

David (18-24/PP) was aware of the risks of dangerous driving from successive graphic road safety campaigns. However, he believed that *‘it would never happen to me’* because *‘I’m a good driver’*.

This guy is on his phone and he hits a kid at the crossroads – adverts that used to be on back in the day, were very graphic of car crashes and that. They are the ones that stick out to me. But then you never think it's going to happen to you. You'd never be in a car accident you know. You think you are alert enough or a good driver. You won't crash. Which is a silly way of thinking about it. Subconsciously I though this is ok for me to do, maybe subconsciously that's what I thought.

In a theme that emerged across different sections of the interviews, participants felt that future road safety campaigns should include the voices of those who were disqualified from driving. Such stories would bring that experience to life and build awareness of the impact of the disqualification across all aspects of the life of the driver. Disqualification would become less hypothetical and anecdotal, and more relatable, vivid, probable and impactful. Louise (18-24/DrugD), for example, reported that:

I'm sure if I had read something or been able to hear someone speak about what happened to them maybe that would have changed my mind then. Because I didn't know anyone who had been in trouble like that before.

Similar arguments were made by David (18-24/PP) and Martin (18-24/DrugD), with the latter reporting that “I don't think the ads of people getting caught drunk driving helps. I think what really helps is the story behind the people”.

Amy (53+/DD) “would love to see someone very genuine like me come out and just have a story to tell... I have not seen an ad on the telly from the RSA that would encourage me to just refrain”. Stephen (18-24/DD) also felt that the stories need to feel real so that the driver can realise that “this could happen to me” and reflect on what life would be like if he/she was disqualified. Watching strangers on the television being “put off the road” isn't relatable, he

argued. Their story needs to be articulated, both in terms of the lead-up to the offence and the consequences.

You can hear about certain people being put off the road and you can see the new limits being put in, the new penalties being put in, at least for me it didn't really impact me, I didn't give a shite until I actually got put off the road myself, or at least see somebody in my close circle being put off the road.

RSA Education Programs

Some of the younger drivers participated in RSA education programmes run in post-primary schools. Typically, they knew that they had participated in the programmes but could not remember the content by the time of the disqualification. Odran (18-24/DD, NoIns, NCT), for example, believed that the RSA ran a programme during his 5th or 6th year but that

so much information is going in in school, some of it flew in one ear and out the other. I can't really remember that day if you get me.

Conor (25-31/NoIns), who wasn't aware of RSA initiatives at primary school level, called for road safety education to be commenced at a younger age.

I think it should be brought into education from a younger age - That would be a much more useful tool for educating people because that's when you learn, that's when you make all your bad habits.

3.2.1 Possible future road safety strategies

Participants were asked about changes to existing road safety strategies, or novel road strategies, that could have impacted them had they been in place when they committed the offence(s). Media coverage in 2018 and 2019 had centred around the possibility of introducing a public register of disqualified drivers, and this became the focus of discussion for some of the interviewees.

Participants typically did not argue in favour or against such an initiative, and instead considered the various possible benefits (might it deter offending) and risks (might it have unintended consequences) and how it might work (e.g., fear of being shamed). Where participants did have an overall view on the proposed initiative, it often changed over the course of the interview, as the interviewees considered and reflected upon how it would

work and how it might impact their lives. Dominant themes emerging from the interviews are presented below.

It could affect my life in the future

A number of the interviewees felt that publicly naming disqualified drivers may dissuade would-be offenders due to fears that future employers would be able to assess the records thus impacting on the ability of the driver to secure employment. Ronan (18 – 24/DD), for example, reported that:

Yeah probably would make me consider that “Jesus, this isn't going to just affect my insurance or a couple of points or a fine, it can affect my career choice or employment” ..

Peter (18-24/DD) expressed a similar concern, noting that once you are named

that’s you, you are out there and you can get seen by anybody and everybody. And that is there for employers down the line and everybody.

I would feel even more ashamed

Participants acknowledged that being placed on a public disqualification register would increase the shame of the offence, and may therefore be a deterrent to offending. This was particularly the case with drink-driving, an offence that is viewed as being particularly shameful. As Stephen (18-24/DD) reported, “no one likes having their name tarnished up on a website or anything like that..... It is a very bad first impression to be giving someone”. To the extent that people would avoid actions that could lead to public shaming, then it could deter re-offending according to some of the participants.

The whole shame would stick with them, and the whole experience would stick with them. So, I guess that would definitely impact them from ever drink-driving again” (Alan, 18-24 /DD).

There would be other benefits

Participants identified other possible benefits of naming and shaming. Fiona (53+/PP), for example, was concerned that there are disqualified drivers who continue to drive during their disqualification, and a public register would help the Gardai identify these drivers.

I think it would be an excellent idea because I think only 2% of the people off the road actually declare the system they are off the road. So people are just merrily driving around you know what I mean. I definitely think an iPad or some sort of ID to check what your status is.

Martin (18-24/DrugD), though doubtful that publicly naming participants would prevent drink-driving, believed that “if it is on a county council website maybe and it is very localised” it may have an impact because the disqualified driver will be known within the community.

Pushed over the edge

Many of the participants spoke about the negative impacts of being publicly named as a disqualified driver however, and questioned if doing so through a register was defensible. One driver for example, spoke about his suicidal thoughts after being named in the media.

I think that is a horrible idea because I went through depression, emotional anxiety and the embarrassment of it and I don't think it will deter drivers but what I do think is what it will do is that for the people that were caught who are already serving a sentence make them serve another sentence.

Similarly, another driver experienced suicidal thoughts after her disqualification and which she associated, in part at least, with the shame of her offence. She believed that being named and shamed on a register would have had serious implications for her.

I probably would have topped myself. Like I have been through some serious shit where I probably thought about that a lot more than you think, but I definitely think that that would have been one of the reasons to push me over the edge.

Ineffective because it would not influence in-the-moment decision making

Others were less mixed in their views, expressing the belief that publicly naming disqualified drivers would have no impact on driving. David (18-24/PP), Gerard (18-24/ DD), Barry (32-38/DD), Robert (18-24/PP) and Conor (25-31/ PP) for example, argued that if a public register had been in place at the time of the offence, it would not have prevented the offence occurring. They endorsed a view expressed by Gerard that when he made the decision to drive after drinking after a night out, that such an initiative would not have been at the forefront of his mind “in the moment’.

No absolutely not, no. I wouldn't have even thought about that at that moment. Apart from physically taking the keys from me, I don't know what would have worked.

Gerard estimated that he had consumed an estimated 20 units of alcohol before leaving the pub the night of his offence. He drove to the pub with the intention of leaving the car there

until the following day, but when he passed the car on the way home he made an impulsive decision to drive.

Sharon (25-31/ DDMA) drove home the morning after a night out drinking. She suspected she might be over the limit before driving, but thought the chances of being caught during the day were remote. A public register, she said, would not have influenced her decision.

Definitely not it just wouldn't have come across my mind - no definitely not. I wouldn't have thought of that. That would probably be the last thing that you think of.

David (18-24/PP), Robert (18-24/PP) and Conor (25-31/PP) were disqualified for exceeding the maximum number of penalty points. All argued that a register would have had no impact on their offending, and suggesting that there is usually not a deliberate consideration of consequences in those moments when a driver breaks the road safety laws.

Ineffective because no shame for some

David (18-24/PP) pointed to a perceived difference between drink-driving and penalty points disqualifications. He had been disqualified for speeding and holding a mobile phone while driving. He felt there was very little shame involved in these offences as “it’s not drink-driving” and so a public register wouldn’t have deterred him from his offences. The only thing that would have prevented his offending, he believed, was a technological solution such as a speed limiter.

Another participant also expressed the view that a public register would be ineffective as his rural community already knew about his disqualification, making the core aim of a name-shame campaign redundant – “I don't think that would make much difference to most people to be honest.” (Colm, 18-24/NoIns). Odran (18-24/DD, NoIns, NCT) believed that many drink-drivers are named in the local media and a national public register would not add extra deterrent value beyond the shame of being exposed through local radio, newspapers and social media.

Roan (25-31/DD) argued that while a register would not have changed his behaviour, it might have had more of an impact on older drivers more prone to experiencing shame.

It depends it may work to a certain age demographic... I'm not sure it would stop somebody in their early teens or 20s... you know the bravado the cockiness all that kind of stuff... the

confidence. Maybe it might affect the older kind of person where the embarrassment is what you are targeting there.

Similarly, Brian (18-24/DD) believed that though it would not have influenced his own behaviour, it may have had an impact on others more prone to shame and where being known as a disqualified driver “is a factor, a big factor in some people’s eyes”.

As an example, Amy (53+/DDMA) is the oldest participant in the study. She was against the suggestion that she, or other disqualified drivers, might be publicly named. She did not disclose her disqualification at work due to the stigma of the drink-driving offence. To be placed on a register, she felt, was like being named “on the sex offenders list”.

3.3 Examining trends across different types of drivers and offenders

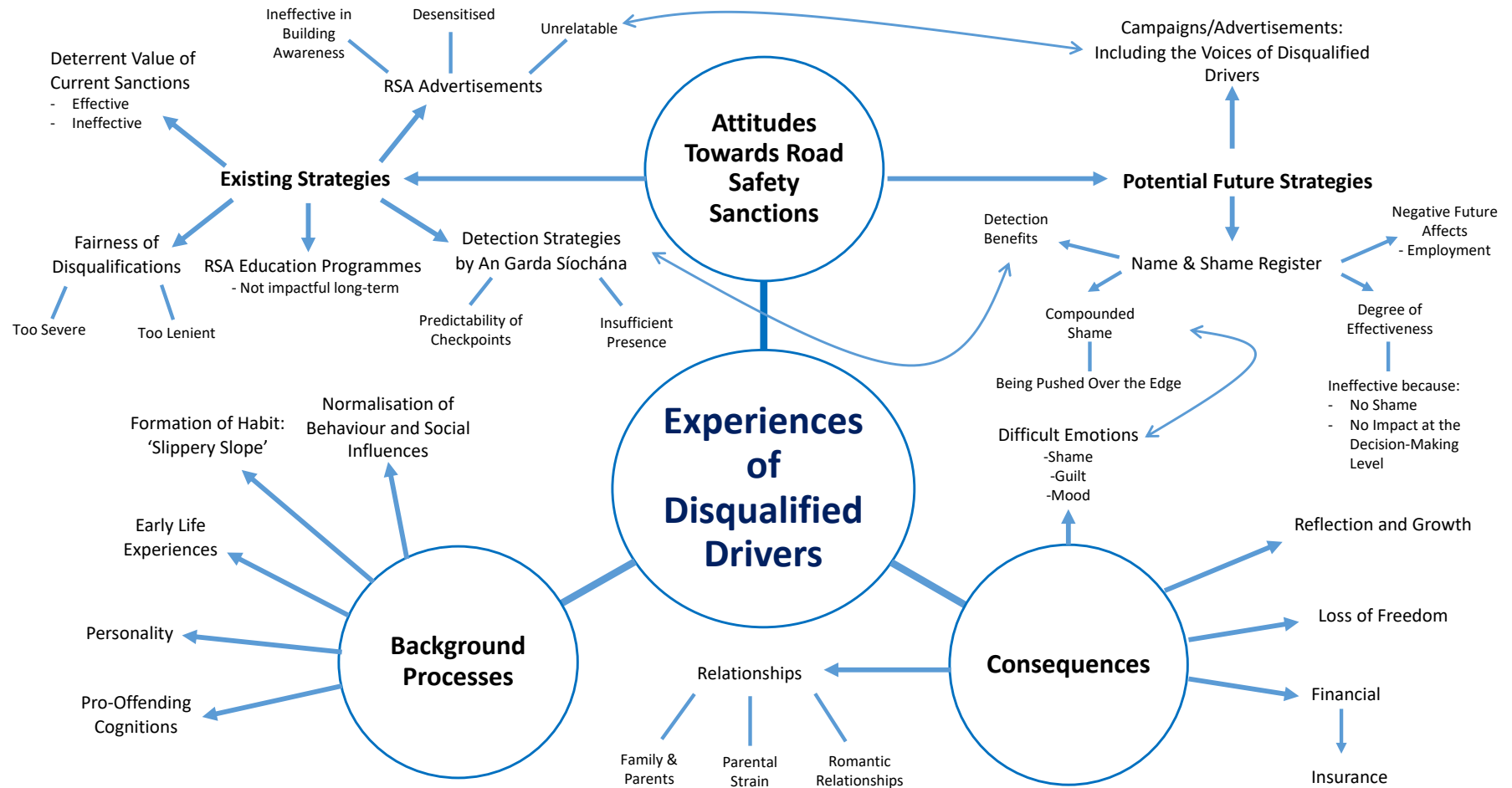
We returned to the transcripts to explore differences across different types of offences/offenders and for those who do and do not drive for work. We first examined differences between drink-drivers/drug-drivers and those disqualified through the accumulation of penalty points. We noted that drink-drivers and drug-drivers tended to report more shame and embarrassment due to their offending than those disqualified for penalty points. They also appeared to link their offences to underlying psychological distress and substance abuse, which was in contrast to those who lost their licences through penalty points. Both groups accepted that their offences were wrong and merited disqualification and both reported experiences of personal growth during their time off the road.

A distinct sub-group emerged within the drink-driving cohort. Those disqualified after failing a test the ‘morning after’, resented being treated like other drink-drivers. They accepted that disqualification was appropriate but felt that the offence should be distinct from that of driving immediately after a drinking session.

We also looked at differences across those who do and do not drive for work, based on the frequency with which themes were present in the two sets of transcripts. However, no trends emerged. We believe this arose as we defined those who drive for work as anyone who used their car for work, even occasionally, and could claim expenses for this use. This group may not be markedly dissimilar to disqualified drivers in general. None of those interviewed were commercial drivers. A sample of commercial drivers, including drivers of Heavy Goods

Vehicles (HGVs), and those who drive exclusively for a living, such as taxi drivers – may have provided more divergent experiences.

Figure 1: Thematic Map emerging from interviews with disqualified drivers



Section 4: Discussion

4.0 Key findings

A thematic map summarising the key themes emerging from the research is presented in Figure 1, above. In this section of the report we provide a synthesis of the findings relating to a) psychosocial processes, b) consequences of disqualification and c) attitudes towards sanctions. Implications of the findings for road safety practice and prevention strategies are also highlighted and a number of recommendations are presented.

4.1 Key findings - Processes leading to disqualification

4.1.0 Key processes and the social ecology model

Participants reported a range of factors that, they believed, contributed to their offending. In the analyses we focused on processes that emerged across the majority of interviews. These processes as a whole can be synthesised through a number of different theoretical lenses, but given the dominance of sources of social influence (or normalisation) as being important in the transcripts, there may be particular value in drawing on a social ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which has been used in elsewhere to understand serious road traffic offending (e.g., Musselwhite, Avineri & Susilo, 2014).

Social ecological models of offending focus on the interplay between different personal and contextual processes in determining behaviour. During our interviews, the majority of disqualified drivers reported enabling attitudes and beliefs within their communities, family and peers. This included a tacit or explicit acceptance of the legitimacy of drink-driving after a night out, of drug-driving, or speeding. There is a sense that these sources of influence in the drivers' macro-systems (wider community and culture), exo-system (local community) and microsystem (family and peers) normalised their offending behaviour rendering it morally justifiable.

This may have led to the acquisition of a range of pro-criminal cognitions at the individual level that reflected the beliefs and values present in this system of social influence. Drivers believed they were above the law (entitlement) and developed a plethora of excuses for their offending including that they 'had no choice' (mollification). For those who had mixed thoughts about offending, in the moment decision making was heavily influence by

cognitions that allowed them to circumvent their doubts including a tendency to think ‘#uck it’ (‘cutoff’).

With such pro-criminal cognitions (i.e., believing one is above the law and legitimising offending), an important barrier to offending is a belief that if they offend they will be caught. Yet many of the drivers interviewed reported ‘super-optimism’ - the belief that the risk of being caught or being in a collision was very low. In general, the range of pro-offending cognitions reported by the participants is in line with past research that implicates pro-criminal thinking in serious road traffic offending. Studies by Greenberg and colleagues (2004, 2005a), Bishop (2011) and Freeman and colleagues (2006), for example, identified mollification, super-optimism and entitlement in their samples of repeat offenders. There is also evidence that super-optimism, in particular, is implicated in persistent offending (Palmer & Hollin, 2010).

For some, offending became part of the repertoire of behaviours through a slippery slope process where behaviours occurred with more and more frequency. This commenced, for a number of drivers, very soon after obtaining their driving licence. The literature on the formation of habit in risky driving is relevant here (e.g., De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007; Lourens, 1992), as is the literature suggesting that building self-awareness of habit formation can lead to changes in habits such as speeding (e.g., Ruheena, 2020).

Personality traits may also play a role for some offenders, with a number of drivers interviewed here suggesting that impulsivity, perceived difficulties with attention, and a tendency towards disregarding authority (and normlessness) was implicated in their offending. Again, this is in line with previous research on risky driving which has reported small but significant associations between some personality traits and risky driving among drivers in Ireland (Sarma, Carey, Kervick & Bimpeh, 2013) and abroad (Greaves & Ellison, 2011).

This social ecological perspective on disqualified driving captures some of the processes reported by those interviewed and as such offers a potentially valuable broad explanatory model that can help identify potentially valuable areas for public health interventions. However, this should not be construed as being applicable to all disqualified drivers. In fact,

when we looked beyond these broad explanatory themes, the most striking feature of the testimonies of the participants was the heterogeneity of their experiences.

Taking those who were disqualified for drink-driving, for example, a small number of drivers linked their offending to life stressors such as relationship break-down. Others, however, linked it to very poor in-the-moment impulse decision making exacerbated by their intoxication and were not struggling in their personal lives. Yet others viewed drink-driving as low-risk and regularly drove home after a night out. Those disqualified for drink-driving, thus, do so through a range of processes and should be considered a diverse group.

4.1.1 Key findings - Consequences of Disqualification

Disqualification had both psychological and practical implications for drivers. On a psychological level, almost all experienced some degree of guilt for their actions, and felt diminished in the eyes of others (i.e., felt shamed). Despite believing that many in society implicitly or explicitly condoned their drink-driving or other type of driving offences, once disqualified they encountered judgment and stigma. This was particularly, though not exclusively, evident among those disqualified for drink-driving.

Shame was a dominant theme in the interviews. Drivers spoke about the shame of telling friends and family. They felt that they had let their parents down. For those with young children, they could see the hypocrisy of their actions and its contrast with the messages they were trying to convey at home. They also feared telling romantic partners and colleagues at work of their offending, fearing that they would be criticised and further shamed. For some, in addition to shame, disqualification brought conflict with those around them – parents, spouses and children. This was most notable among younger drivers and the damage caused to their relationships with their parents.

On a practical level, many reported that they lost some of their independence. For those in rural areas with limited public transport options, they became reliant on the good will of friends, colleagues and family to get to work, training for sports and social events. Feeling like they were becoming a burden, some of the participants left work, stopped training and reduced their attendance at social events, leading to feelings of isolation. Children of parents disqualified from driving did not have a voice in this study. However, based on the accounts

of parents it is clear that their lives too were impacted in terms of mobility, reliance on other parents for lifts, disappointment and embarrassment.

Reflecting on their time disqualified, almost all of our participants reported finding benefit in their period “off the road”. For some it marked a time for reflecting on their lives – problematic drinking, drug-taking, busy and pressure-filled days and driving habits for example - and they took steps to address personal difficulties. This, they reported, led to personal growth. For many, but not all, with this personal growth came an appreciation for the need for robust road safety enforcement and sanctioning and an intention to become safer drivers.

There were some differences in experiences of disqualification within the sample. Those disqualified for drink-driving experienced shame, embarrassment and guilt more profoundly than those disqualified through penalty points, for instance. Within this group of drink-drivers, there were also a number who were disqualified for drink-driving ‘the morning after’ – a group that didn’t consider themselves ‘offenders’, would have argued that they ‘never drink and drive’, and had to come to terms with their offence and its consequences.

Those who were disqualified through penalty points were less likely to feel ashamed. They felt more at ease explaining what had happened to them to others. This is despite the fact that most had 4 road traffic violations, often involving a series of different offences (e.g., speeding and holding a mobile phone). They attribute less stigma to these offences, which many believed could happen to anyone at any time. The greatest consequences for these drivers were practical – the loss of independence and mobility, difficulties securing insurance when their licences were restored, and loss of employment.

There were also some differences between those who do and do not drive for work. For those who drive for work, some had to inform their employers and resign their positions. One driver was moved within an organisation to take up non-driving duties. Others became wholly reliant on the good-will of colleagues.

4.1.2 Key findings – what works and what might work

Attitudes towards driver disqualification as a sanction for serious road traffic offending varied within our sample. When the drivers considered if the sanction was ‘fair’, some viewed it as too punitive and others as too lenient. Interestingly, the drink-drivers, and particularly those

marginally over the limit and/or detected 'the morning after', often felt that the sanction was too severe while those disqualified through penalty points tended to believe that their sanction was appropriate. The sense from the interviews is that those disqualified through penalty points believed they have been given sufficient warning of the risk of disqualification (most accumulated points over time) and thus accepted that could have taken steps to avoid this outcome. Morning-after drink-drivers, on the other hand, couldn't accept that they were being treated the same as those tested immediately after a drinking session and who returned high Blood Alcohol Concentration levels.

Looking in more detail at the interviews, we also observed that those who reported that disqualification is 'too harsh' were those who reported the most severe personal and practical consequences of their disqualification. It is not necessarily the driving disqualification itself that determines how severe the sanction is, but the impact of the ban on daily living.

A separate issue to 'fairness', is efficacy in reducing offending. Here most drivers were of the view that the *experience of disqualification* is so severe that it deters repeat offending, but equally that the *threat of disqualification* had no bearing on their initial index offence(s) (because they didn't appreciate the reality of being off the road at that point). This distinction arose across multiple segments in the interviews and is one of the key themes emerging from the study. Most of our drivers called for an awareness campaign that conveys to drivers who may be inclined to take risks on the road, but have not yet been disqualified, the real-life stories of disqualification and its consequences. Many wished they had understood this better before their index offence(s).

Another theme that emerged in relation to enforcement and sanctions was a perception that there needs to more garda presence and detection activities around serious road traffic offending. The participants stressed that as long as drivers view the probability of being detected offending as extremely low, that penalty points, fines and disqualification will not reduce persistent offending. This is reflected, they further argued, in what they perceived as widespread use of mobile phones while driving, driving above the speed limit and drink-driving.

Participants reported that Road Safety messaging around the consequences of risky driving had little or no effect on their behaviour before disqualification. They tended to see the

events depicted, including serious collisions, injuries and fatalities, as not relevant – because it wouldn't happen to them and never entered their awareness. Again, they argued that these campaigns needed to be made more relevant to offenders by depicting the story behind offending and consequences of disqualification through real stories.

Finally, when considering the potential value of novel road safety initiatives, drivers discussed the proposed register of disqualified drivers which has been discussed in the broadcast and print media. Views on the proposed initiative were mixed. Some drivers suggested that the threat of being placed on a register might deter offending. Others were clear that it would not. One participant suggested that naming disqualified drivers would help the Gardaí identify those disqualified but who continue to drive, and another suggested this would only work if the names were also published in the regional and local media. In general, the interviews neither supported or undermined such an initiative in terms of efficacy.

What was clear, however, were concerns expressed by participants that such a register could have unintended negative consequences for those disqualified. They feared the loss of privacy that could arise and the increased experiences of shame. They pointed out that the register could be searched by future potential employers, therefore affecting employment opportunities. For those who already had pre-existing psychological vulnerabilities, being named and shamed could exacerbate their distress and potentially lead to self-harm and suicide.

4.2 Implications and recommendations

The central objective of this study was to present a body of evidence that could be used to identify potentially fruitful areas for road safety intervention. Based on the themes that emerged, we propose the following key areas for further consideration by the RSA.

4.2.0 Area 1: Targeting Permissive Attitudes

One of the key themes that emerged was the role of perceived permissive attitudes of communities, peers and families in supporting offending. To the extent that there *are* sections of communities with such attitudes, this then justifies on-going public health messaging that seeks to draw attention to the link between such serious offending and road traffic collisions, injuries and fatalities. There may also be value in promoting an awareness of the potential role of perceived acceptance of dangerous driving in encouraging offending.

4.2.1 Area 2: Accurate assessments of the acceptability of offending

There was also a sense from the interviews that drivers didn't fully appreciate, until after their disqualification, that they would be judged harshly by some in their communities. This may point to an attentional bias where they overestimated permissive attitudes while they were offending. There may be value in measuring such attitudes in public attitude surveys and, assuming that a significant majority of the population do not accept that persistent driving violations and drink-driving is justifiable, using this information to encourage a more accurate assessment of how society judges these behaviours.

4.2.2 Area 3: Addressing pro-criminal thinking

Pro-offending cognitions are central to the processes behind serious road traffic offending. Such cognitions are a feature of all forms of persistent offending, and are routinely the focus of crime-prevention programmes. During such programmes professionals encourage offenders to consider the potential risks associated with their actions and overcome a tendency to underestimate those risks (i.e., super-optimism). They also encourage offenders to take responsibility for their actions, rather than externalising blame to others or context (i.e., mollification). While these approaches feature heavily in interventions for serious road traffic offenders internationally, there may also be scope to harness these processes in public health campaigns.

4.2.3 Area 4: Promoting a more nuanced understanding of 'disqualified drivers'

An important finding from the research is that the processes leading to disqualification vary widely. In the various testimonies we heard of multiple different routes into driver disqualification, even for specific types of offences. For some drink-driving disqualifications, for example, the offence arose through disinhibition and judgement error while intoxicated (being drunk precipitated the offence). For others, however, there was an underlying alcohol dependency. Here a background vulnerability (alcohol dependence) appeared to be the main risk factor in the offending. For others still, drink-driving was viewed as culturally acceptable in their areas, something that many people did at the weekend, yet was not spoken about or overtly supported. This points to the need for road safety strategies to understand the complexity of serious road traffic offences like drink-driving, and develop interventions that have multiple aspects sensitive to the varying processes involved.

4.2.4 Area 5: Risk specification in serious road traffic offending

A starting point in this work towards a more nuanced approach to serious road traffic offending, is to appreciate that the term ‘disqualified driver’ describes only the outcome – the loss of the licence due to serious offending. It tells us nothing of how the offence came about or how we can intervene to prevent offending in the future. If we accept this, then it makes sense to become more specific in our language around driver disqualification. Again, this resonates with the broader forensic literature which has long argued that key to effective risk mitigation is threat and hazard specification. It is also in line with lessons learned from road safety campaigns (e.g., Hoekstra & Wegman, 2011). The more specific we are about the behaviour of concern (morning after drink-driving, impulsive drink-driving, persistent drink-driving etc.) the better positioned we will be to be sensitive to risk factors for that type of threat and thus put in place effective mitigation strategies.

4.2.5 Area 6: Making disqualification ‘real’ for drivers

Reflecting on the far reaching consequences of disqualification, those interviewed concluded that had they known what it was really like, they would have been more careful on the road. Drivers should hear these stories first hand, they argued, to appreciate what disqualification really means. This is a theme that arose in all parts of the interview, including when discussing ‘what works’ in reducing serious road traffic offending. This points to the potential value of public health messaging that conveys the real-world consequences of disqualification.

4.2.6 Area 7: Publicly naming disqualified drivers

Views as to the efficacy of publicly naming disqualified drivers were mixed, with some arguing it might deter offending, and others arguing that it would not. There was greater consensus, however, that a register would have a host of negative unintended consequences for offenders. Those with underlying mental health difficulties are a particularly vulnerable group and the testimony provided in this study would suggest that the RSA should consider the societal ethics of the initiative (in addition to its possible efficacy) in its deliberations.

4.3 Limitations

This is the first study to explore the lives of disqualified drivers in Ireland. We believe the study has offered a unique insight into the pathways into serious road traffic offending, and has shed light on beliefs and attitudes relating to sanctions and road safety initiatives.

However, there are a number of limitations to the study. Most importantly, while the study has provided us with a glimpse into the lives of those who spoke with us, the sample in this study self-selected for interview and their experiences may not represent those of the wider population of disqualified drivers. Voices not present in the analyses include drivers disqualified following a fatal road traffic collision, drivers who continued to drive while disqualified, and those who served prison sentences for their driving offences. Commercial drivers were also not represented in the sample, nor are those who have experienced more than one disqualification. In order to produce generalisable findings, this study would need to be augmented with a study of a larger sample of disqualified drivers, where the representativeness of the sample can be assessed against official data.

4.4 Conclusions

Research findings from this report are based on the reflections of disqualified drivers. Inevitably, in asking offenders how they came to offend, a whole host of justifications for offending are elicited. Some offenders blame their childhood, others situational stressors, and others still their peers, communities and cultures. To some extent, then, the entirety of their testimony in relation to their offences could be interpreted as justifications for offending.

Even if this is true, it does not diminish the value of the testimony. Justifications for offending are not necessarily manufactured realities (e.g., untruthful excuses), they are central to the process of committing an offence. Situational stressors may lead to problematic drinking, and in turn exacerbate the risk of drink-driving. Acknowledging this does not make the offence less serious, or render the offender less responsible for the offence. It just allows us to understand how the offence arose.

This is a point that almost all the offenders acknowledged in their interviews. When asked about their offending, they presented their stories, including their understanding of how they came to offend. However, during their disqualification many came to realise these experiences did not in any way legitimise their offence or reduce their culpability.

The stories of disqualified drivers are valid, and they do highlight some pinch-points that may be malleable to road safety intervention. Some of these have been highlighted in this report. Others will emerge from future research on this topic. This research could explore the lives of

distinct groups of drivers not well-represented in this study including commercial drivers (e.g., HGV drivers, couriers etc.), drivers whose initial driving experience was acquired in another jurisdiction, older drivers, and those whose driving led to serious injury or death. There is also value in research with those convicted of drink-driving and/or drug-driving to determine to what extent this is arising due to underlying psychological and dependence disorders. Research could also integrate the disparate sources of information on disqualification in Ireland to provide a quantitative overview of the incidence of disqualification and prevalence within different categories of licence holders, gender, age group etc. Together with the evidence presented in this report, such studies will provide valuable evidence to prevent serious road traffic offending.

References

- Begg, D. J., & Langley, J. D. (2004). Identifying predictors of persistent non-alcohol or drug-related risky driving behaviours among a cohort of young adults. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 36(6), 1067-1071. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2004.03.001>
- Begg, D. J., Langley, J. D., & Stephenson, S. (2003). Identifying factors that predict persistent driving after drinking, unsafe driving after drinking, and driving after using cannabis among young adults. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 35(5), 669-675. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-4575\(02\)00045-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-4575(02)00045-3)
- Bishop, N. (2011). Predicting multiple DUI offenders using the Florida DRI. *Substance Use and Misuse*, 46(5), 696-703. doi:10.3109/10826084.2010.529629
- Brar, S. S. (2014). Estimating the over-involvement of suspended, revoked, and unlicensed drivers as at-fault drivers in California fatal crashes. *Journal of safety research*, 50, 53-58. doi:10.1016/j.jsr.2014.03.010
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bronfenbrenner U. The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1979.
- Buber, R., Gadner, J., & Richards, L. (2004). *Applying Qualitative Methods to Marketing Management Research*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Campbell, J. L., Quincy, C., Osserman, J., & Pedersen, O. K. (2013). Coding in-depth semi structured interviews: Problems of unitization and intercoder reliability and agreement. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 42(3), 294-320.
- Carlson, R. G., Sexton, R., Hammar, L., & Reese, T. H. (2011). Driving themselves to drink: qualitative perspectives from "hardcore" DUI repeat offenders in Ohio. *J Ethn Subst Abuse*, 10(4), 363-379. doi:10.1080/15332640.2011.623550
- Cavaiola, A. A., Strohmets, D. B., Wolf, J. M., & Lavender, N. J. (2003). Comparison of DWI offenders with non-DWI individuals on the MMPI-2 and the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test. *Addictive behaviors*, 28(5), 971-977. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0306-4603\(01\)00291-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0306-4603(01)00291-X)

- Couture, S., Brown, T. G., Ouimet, M. C., Gianoulakis, C., Tremblay, J., & Carbonneau, R. (2008). Hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis response to stress in male DUI recidivists. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 40(1), 246-253.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2007.06.003>
- DeMichele, M., Payne, B., & Lowe, N. C. (2016). Identifying the Characteristics of Chronic Drunk Drivers Using a Criminological Lens. *Crime & Delinquency*, 62(12), 1570-1596.
doi:10.1177/0011128713510079
- De Pelsmacker, P., & Janssens, W. (2007). The effect of norms, attitudes and habits on speeding behavior: Scale development and model building and estimation. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 39(1), 6-15. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2006.05.011>
- Dickson, M. F., Wasarhaley, N. E., & Webster, J. M. (2013). A Comparison of First-Time and Repeat Rural DUI Offenders. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 52(6), 421-437.
doi:10.1080/10509674.2013.813616
- Dugosh, K. L., Festinger, D. S., & Marlowe, D. B. (2013). Moving beyond BAC in DUI: Identifying who is at risk of recidivating Dugosh, Festinger, and Marlowe DUI recidivism. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 12(2), 181-193. doi:10.1111/1745-9133.12020
- Freeman, J., Liossis, P., & David, N. (2006). Deterrence, Defiance and Deviance: An Investigation Into a Group of Recidivist Drink Drivers' Self-Reported Offending Behaviours. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 39(1), 1-19.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1375/acri.39.1.1>
- Freeman, J., & Watson, B. (2006). An application of Stafford and Warr's reconceptualisation of deterrence to a group of recidivist drink drivers. *Accid Anal Prev*, 38(3), 462-471.
doi:10.1016/j.aap.2005.11.001
- Greaves, S. P., & Ellison, A. B. (2011). Personality, risk aversion and speeding: An empirical investigation. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 43(5), 1828-1836.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2011.04.018>

- Greenberg, M. D., Morral, A. R., & Jain, A. K. (2004). How can repeat drunk drivers be influenced to change? Analysis of the association between drunk driving and DUI recidivists' attitudes and beliefs. *J Stud Alcohol*, *65*(4), 460-463.
- Greenberg, M. D., Morral, A. R., & Jain, A. K. (2005). Drink-driving and DUI recidivists' attitudes and beliefs: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of studies on alcohol*, *66*(5), 640-647. doi:10.15288/jsa.2005.66.640
- Gulliver, P., & Begg, D. (2007). Personality factors as predictors of persistent risky driving behavior and crash involvement among young adults. *Inj Prev*, *13*(6), 376-381. doi:10.1136/ip.2007.015925
- Hallstone, M. (2013). The criminal history of repeat DUI offenders. *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, *31*(3), 337-347. doi:10.1080/07347324.2013.800390
- Hoekstra, T., & Wegman, F. (2011). Improving the effectiveness of road safety campaigns: Current and new practices. *IATSS Research*, *34*(2), 80-86. [doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iatssr.2011.01.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iatssr.2011.01.003)
- Hodson, Randy. 1999. *Analyzing Documentary Accounts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hubicka, B., Laurell, H., & Bergman, H. (2008). Criminal and alcohol problems among Swedish drunk drivers - Predictors of DUI relapse. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, *31*(6), 471-478. doi:10.1016/j.ijlp.2008.09.003
- Kim, D.-G., & Lee, Y. (2017). Identifying the influences of demographic characteristics and personality of inveterate drunk drivers on the likelihood of driving under the influence of alcohol (DUIA) recurrence. *International Journal of Urban Sciences*, *21*(3), 300-311.
- Krippendorff, Klaus. 2004. *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lapham, S. C., C'De Baca, J., McMillan, G. P., & Lapidus, J. (2006). Psychiatric Disorders in a Sample of Repeat Impaired-Driving Offenders. *Journal of studies on alcohol*, *67*(5), 707-713. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.15288/jsa.2006.67.707>
- Lenton, S., Fetherston, J., & Cercarelli, R. (2010). Recidivist drink drivers' self-reported reasons for driving whilst unlicensed—A qualitative analysis. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, *42*(2), 637-644.

- Lourens, P. F. (1992). Young car drivers in The Hague: The prevention of bad driving habits after the driving licence has been obtained. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, 5(3-4), 257–265. <https://doi.org/10.1515/IJAMH.1992.5.3-4.257>
- McAlister, A., Lee, D., Ehlert, K. M., Kajfez, R. L., Faber, C. J., & Kennedy, M. S. (2017, June). Qualitative coding: An approach to assess inter-rater reliability. In *American Society for Engineering Education* (pp. 5-9).
- McMillen, D. L., Adams, M. S., Wells-Parker, E., Pang, M. G., & Anderson, B. J. (1992). Personality traits and behaviors of alcohol-impaired drivers: a comparison of first and multiple offenders. *Addictive behaviors*, 17(5), 407-414.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A.M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (Second Edi). Sage Publications.
- Miller, M. A., & Fillmore, M. T. (2014). Cognitive and behavioral preoccupation with alcohol in recidivist DUI offenders. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 75(6), 1018-1022. doi:10.15288/jsad.2014.75.1018
- Musselwhite, C., Avineri, E & Susilo, Y. O. (2014) Legitimising risk taking: articulating dangerous behaviour on the road, *Transportation Planning and Technology*, 37:1, 62-82, DOI: [10.1080/03081060.2013.844905](https://doi.org/10.1080/03081060.2013.844905)
- Nochajski, T. H., & Stasiewicz, P. R. (2006). Relapse to driving under the influence (DUI): A review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 26(2), 179-195. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2005.11.006>
- Nochajski, T. H., & Wieczorek, W. F. (1998). Identifying potential drinking-driving recidivists: Do non-obvious indicators help? *Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community*, 17(1), 69-83. doi:10.1300/J005v17n01_06
- Quimet, M. C., Brown, T. G., Nadeau, L., Lepage, M., Pelletier, M., Couture, S., . . . Ng Ying Kin, N. M. K. (2007). Neurocognitive characteristics of DUI recidivists. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 39(4), 743-750. doi:10.1016/j.aap.2006.11.005

- Palmer, Emma & Hollin, Clive. (2010). Predicting reconviction using the Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles with English prisoners. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 9, 57 - 68. 10.1348/135532504322776852.
- Parrish, K. E., & Masten, S. V. (2015). The Problem of Suspended and Revoked Drivers Who Avoid Detection at Checkpoints. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 16(2), 97-103.
doi:10.1080/15389588.2014.909592
- Purssell, R., Brown, D., Brubacher, J. R., Wilson, J., Fang, M., Schulzer, M., . . . Walker, T. (2010). Proportion of injured drivers presenting to a tertiary care emergency department who engage in future impaired driving activities. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 11(1), 35-42. doi:10.1080/15389580903419125
- Reynolds, J. R., Kuncze, J. T., & Cope, C. S. (1991). Personality differences of first-time and repeat offenders arrested for driving while intoxicated. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 38(3), 289.
- Robertson, A., Gardner, S., Walker, C. S., & Tatch, A. (2016). DUI recidivism by intervention adherence: a multiple risk factor approach. *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 42(5), 597-605. doi:10.3109/00952990.2016.1167898
- Ruheena, S. (2020). ROADSkills: Developing an evidence-based and user-informed approach to refreshing older adults' driving skills. Ontario, Canada: McMaster University.
Retrieved from <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/handle/11375/25356>
- Sarma, K. M. (2019). A review of the literature on serious traffic offenders: A report for the Road Safety Authority of Ireland. Unpublished report.
- Sarma, K. M., Carey, R. N., Kervick, A. A., & Bimpeh, Y. (2013). Psychological factors associated with indices of risky, reckless and cautious driving in a national sample of drivers in the Republic of Ireland. *Accid Anal Prev*, 50, 1226-1235.
doi:10.1016/j.aap.2012.09.020
- Schell, T. L., Chan, K. S., & Morral, A. R. (2006). Predicting DUI recidivism: Personality, attitudinal, and behavioral risk factors. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 82(1), 33-40.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2005.08.006>

- Shaffer, H. J., Nelson, S. E., LaPlante, D. A., LaBrie, R. A., Albanese, M., & Caro, G. (2007). The Epidemiology of Psychiatric Disorders Among Repeat DUI Offenders Accepting a Treatment-Sentencing Option. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 75*(5), 795-804. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.75.5.795
- Voas, R. B., Dupont, R. L., Talpins, S. K., & Shea, C. L. (2011). Towards a national model for managing impaired driving offenders. *Addiction, 106*(7), 1221-1227. doi:10.1111/j.1360-0443.2010.03339.x
- Walters, G. D. & Kaufman, J. C. (2005). *The Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles—Layperson Edition (PICTS-L)*. Allentown, PA: Center for Lifestyle Studies.
- Watson, B., Siskind, V., Fleiter, J. J., Watson, A., & Soole, D. (2015). Assessing specific deterrence effects of increased speeding penalties using four measures of recidivism. *Accident Analysis & Prevention, 84*, 27-37. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2015.08.006>
- Wickens, C. M., Flam-Zalcman, R., Mann, R. E., Stoduto, G., Docherty, C., & Thomas, R. K. (2016). Characteristics and predictors of recidivist drink-drivers. *Traffic Injury Prevention, 17*(6), 564-572. doi:10.1080/15389588.2015.1125477
- Wiliszowski, C., Murphy, P., Jones, R., & Lacey, J. (1996). *Determine Reasons for Repeat Drinking and Driving*. Retrieved from <https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/reasons.pdf>