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## Barriers and facilitators of a designated driver program

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### Abstract

The general aim of designated driver programs is to reduce the level of drink driving by encouraging potential drivers to travel with a driver who has abstained from (or at least limited) consuming alcohol. Designated driver programs are quite widespread around the world, however a limited number have been rigorously evaluated. This paper reports the qualitative results from an evaluation of a designated driver program known as 'Skipper', in a provincial city in Queensland. Focus groups were conducted with 108 individuals from the intervention area. These focus groups aimed to assess the barriers and facilitators to the programs' effectiveness by obtaining information about the patrons' views on various aspects of the program, as well as designated driver and travelling after drinking more generally. A brief questionnaire was also given to participants in order to present responses in terms of the participants' characteristics. Results suggest general support for the designated driver concept and the 'Skipper' program specifically. Facilitating factors reported by participants included the media coverage highlighting the risks associated with drink driving and the social acceptability of choosing not to drink. However, there was also some suggestion that the impact of the program was mainly to encourage those who already engage in designated driver behaviour to continue doing so, rather than encouraging the uptake of the behaviour among potential new users. Some of the suggested barriers to this kind of behaviour change include: social pressure to drink; alcohol dependency; and a failure to plan ahead.

### Keywords

Designated driver, drink driving, process evaluation

### Introduction

Drink driving continues to be a serious problem both overseas and in Australia. Drink driving has been shown to increase the risk of being involved in a crash, with drivers who drink having a crash risk (depending on their blood alcohol concentration (BAC)) anywhere between 1.5 and 25 times that of sober drivers [1]. Approximately 27% of fatal crashes in Queensland involved alcohol and/or drugs in the 2007/08 financial year [2].

It has been suggested that if it is understood why people drink and drive, countermeasures can be better designed to prevent it from occurring [3]. Research into the factors involved in drink driving has shown that it is a complex problem which requires a variety of different approaches to be taken in its prevention [3]. Factors suggested to influence drink driving include:

- attitudes toward drink driving (both the individual and their social group);
- other personal factors (eg, alcohol dependence; [4]);
- deterrence (fear of getting caught and punished [5]);
- knowledge (eg, the effects of alcohol on safe driving); and
- situational factors (eg, transport availability; [4]).

Designated driver programs primarily aim to target the situational factors involved, in order to reduce the overall level of drink driving, by encouraging potential drivers to travel with a driver who has abstained from (or at least limited) consuming alcohol. More particularly, the primary target group for these programs are those potential drivers who need to travel to and from public drinking venues.

Designated driver programs are quite widespread around the world [6, 7, 8, 9, 10], however a limited number have been rigorously evaluated and have not provided clear information on the barriers and facilitators to these programs' effectiveness. While the research literature is not sufficient to confirm a specific best practice model, it does suggest that designated driver programs should incorporate the following elements:

- public education to support the program, addressing the following key messages:

- choose a designated driver prior to drinking,
  - the designated driver should stay under legal limit, and
  - the designated driver drives passengers home safely.
- involvement of key stakeholders, including motivated licensed premises; and
  - systematic management and monitoring of the program [11].

In 2006/7, the Queensland Government Steering Committee developed a designated driver program named 'Skipper'. The 'Skipper' program is an in-premises program in which patrons agree to stay sober and drive their friends home in exchange for free soft drinks. In July 2007, this program was implemented as a trial in Mackay (intervention area), supported by media (facilitated by Recording Artists, Actors, & Athletes Against Drink Driving - RADD) including radio and press as well as advertising in premises (e.g., posters). A total of 41 venues agreed to participate in the program at the time the follow-up data collection was conducted.

An evaluation is currently being finalised and aims to provide a better understanding of whether designated driver programs are effective in reducing drink driving, as well as providing knowledge about the processes that facilitate and/or impede their effectiveness. It aims to achieve this by conducting a comprehensive evaluation that identifies whether the 'Skipper' designated driver program is effective in achieving its desired *outcomes*, and also examine the adequacy of the *processes* underpinning its implementation. Preliminary outcome findings comparing the results of the pre and post surveys conducted in Mackay and Rockhampton have been previously reported [12]. This paper will report on the results of focus groups with patrons as part of the *process* component of the evaluation.

## Method

### *Participants and sampling*

Focus groups were conducted with 108 individuals who frequented public drinking venues in the intervention area (Mackay). Eight focus groups were conducted over three days, approximately 6 months after the 'Skipper' program was implemented. Potential participants (any individual with a valid drivers' licence) were recruited via radio and newspaper advertisements as well as via posters displayed at local TAFE and University campuses. Individuals who had participated in the 'Skipper' program as well as those who had not were included.

### *Materials*

A set of open-ended questions were developed and used in the focus groups. They were designed to access more detailed information about the patrons' views on all the aspects of the 'Skipper' program (e.g., general concept, advertising approaches, registration process), as well as designated driver practices and travelling after drinking more generally. Participants in the 'Skipper' focus groups were asked additional questions based on their direct experience of the program. A brief questionnaire was also given to all focus group participants in order to discuss responses in terms of the participants' characteristics (e.g., gender, age).

### *Procedure*

Each of the eight focus groups took approximately one hour and had about 12-13 people in each and were audio taped for later transcription. Participants were assigned a letter that they displayed on a name tag and filled out on their questionnaire. This process allowed for identification of focus group discussion responses in relation to their demographic information, while still maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. Responses to the focus group questionnaire were entered into SPSS 15 for analysis. Frequencies were produced based on the survey responses. Focus group discussion responses were transcribed and collated with record of the gender, age, and participant status ('Skipper' or 'Non-Skipper') of the participant. Examples of comments that illustrate the themes that emerged are presented with the gender and age of the respondent who made the comment provided.

## Results

### Survey

Almost three quarters of focus group participants held open licences. There was a higher proportion of female participants than male participants, with the majority of participants aged under 30. Almost all participants had access to a vehicle and almost three quarters worked full time (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants in focus groups

Participant characteristic	Level	N	%
Gender	Male	42	38.9
	Female	66	61.1
Age group	17-24	34	31.5
	25-29	41	38.0
	30-39	23	21.3
	40-49	7	6.5
	50-59	3	2.8
	60 and over	0	0.0
Licence type	Learner	1	0.9
	Provisional/restricted	29	26.9
	Open/full	78	72.2
Employment status	Full-time	75	69.4
	Part-time	8	7.4
	Casual	7	6.5
	Student	15	13.9
	Unemployed	3	2.8
Access to vehicle	Yes	104	96.3
	No	4	3.7

When asked about how many times they had driven a vehicle when they thought they may have been over the legal alcohol limit (relevant to their licence class) in the last three months, 88.0% responded “none”, 8.3% once, and 3.7% more than once. Participants were slightly more likely to report that they had been a passenger of a vehicle when they believed the driver may have been over the limit in the last three months, with 84.3% responding “none”, 13.0% once, and 2.8% more than once. As with the personal characteristics, this pattern of response is somewhat consistent with the sample of participants obtained in the outcome evaluation component of the research [12].

### Focus group questions

#### Have you heard of ‘Skipper’

The focus group participants who had heard of ‘Skipper’ reported obtaining the information from a variety of sources, including:

The radio:

“...it’s all over the radio.” – Female ‘Skipper’ aged 25-29

“...they get sports stars and that to do them (radio ads).” – Female aged 30-39

The licensed premises:

*"...it's in the pubs too."* – Male 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"...posters in the loos."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 40-49

The newspaper:

*"...the paper had some articles, with that footy guy that got done (for drink driving)."* – Male 'Skipper' aged 25-29

*"There have been some ads in the paper, with sporting personalities, RADD do them."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

### What does a Skipper do?

Many of the participants appeared to understand the concept of a 'Skipper' and the requirements for being a 'Skipper'.

For example, some stated what they thought a Skipper should do:

*"Yeah, don't drink, and drive their friends home."* – Male 'Skipper' aged 25-29

*"...they stay sober and take people home."* – Female aged 25-29

Others discussed some possible reasons for the program:

*"...encourage people not to drink and drive."* – Female aged 25-29

*"...less crashes."* – Male aged 17-24

Other participants reported the details of how the program works:

*"..get free drinks...soft drinks."* – Male aged 17-24

*"You register, get an armband and free soft drink."* – Female aged 17-24

### What do you think of the name "Skipper"

Opinions on the name 'Skipper' were relatively positive:

*"It's ok – you know the skipper is in charge."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"I like it...with sport, the captain of the team is the skipper"* – Male aged 25-29

Some participants had less favourable views:

*"I don't like it."* – Female aged 17-24

*"It's just like those lame names government gives things, they try to be cool but they're not"* – Male aged 25-29

When asked about what else they would like it to be called, some participants had suggestions such as:

*"They could just call it designated driver, everyone already knows what that is"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"...I've heard it called Sober Bob"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 25-29

*"...you can't call it Bob, what about girls?"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 25-29

Other participants didn't think it mattered what it was called:

*"...it doesn't matter what they call it, it will always be lame."* – Male aged 17-24

What do you think should be changed about the program, if anything?

Some participants thought the registration process should be simplified:

*"Less paperwork...too much at the moment"* – Female aged 25-29

*"Should make it easier to sign up"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 17-24

More advertising was also suggested, especially about where the program was running:

*"I think there should be more advertising, especially about where you can do it, which pubs."*  
- Male aged 17-24

*"...more billboards in front of the venues, so it's obvious to everyone"*  
– Male aged 17-24

There was also discussion about how all the venues should run the program and that it should be more consistent, as evidenced by the following comments:

*"More venues should do it; it should be in every one"* – Female aged 17-24

*"All the people at the pubs should do it the same"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

What should stay the same about the program?

Overall, there appeared to be strong support to retain the main elements of 'Skipper':

*"Keep it running the same way, and don't let it drop off"*  
– Male 'Skipper' aged 25-29

*"Everything, really, just more of it and make it consistent"* – Male aged 30-39

What do you think about 'Skipper' being available everywhere?

Similarly, there was overwhelming support for the 'Skipper' program to be expanded into every venue:

*"Should be everywhere, but some venues are too cheap to participate"* – Male aged 17-24

*"Should be everywhere, every town"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 40-49

What do you think the impact of 'Skipper' will be on drink driving in Mackay?

Some participants thought that 'Skipper' may reduce drink driving for a number of reasons:

*"It might affect it, like if I don't drive my friends home, they might drink and drive instead."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 50-59

*"It gives people another option I guess"* – Female aged 25-29

*"Because the media highlights the problem that might make people think twice"* – Female aged 30-39

Some believed it wouldn't have any impact on drink driving because the people who act as 'Skippers' are not the key target group:

*"I don't know, I wouldn't drink and drive anyway."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"People who are being 'Skippers' are the good ones, so wouldn't do it (drink drive)"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 30-39

Others thought it would have no impact because they believed that high risk individuals would not be affected by most interventions, as suggested by the following comments:

*"I think if people want to (drink and drive) they just will."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"People who are full-on pissheads, you know addicted to drink; they will drink drive no matter what."* – Male aged 40-49

*"Only getting busted and maybe taking their cars will stop the hard cores"*  
– Female aged 30-39

Do you think the 'Skipper' program will make other people more likely to be a designated driver than before? Why/Why not?

Most participants indicated that they did not think 'Skipper' would make people more likely to be a designated driver:

*"I don't reckon, if you want to, you'd be doing it already"* – Female aged 25-29

Some participants believed that the reluctance of some to become 'Skippers' reflected the culture of drinking in the area:

*"It's the culture here to drink. You need to drink to have a good time and that is that for some people."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"You can't drink and that just sucks."* – Male aged 17-24

Some participants specifically cited the role of social pressure in discouraging the practice of being a designated driver:

*"No, your friends would pay out on you."* – Male aged 25-29

*"Peer pressure would stop a lot of people."* – Male aged 17-24

*"It's hard not to drink when your friends are"* – Female aged 17-24

Other participants suggested that some people do not plan ahead enough to be a designated driver:

*"Some people just don't think ahead, so they get stuck and just drink and drive or catch a taxi to get home"* – Female aged 30-39

*"You've got to plan ahead and not everyone does that."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 40-49

*"Someone might volunteer to be a designated driver but then change their mind and drink"* – Female 17-24

Due to their direct involvement in the 'Skipper' program, people who reported having acted as 'Skippers' were asked some extra questions.

What made you want to be a 'Skipper'?

A variety of reasons were reported for becoming a 'Skipper', including:

*"It's just good, it's cheaper, safer."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"I did it anyway....did it before 'Skipper'."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 25-29

When asked if incentives were a factor, most stated that while they liked the incentive, it did not influence their decision, as reflected in the following comments:

*"Don't think soft drink matters, like it's cheaper, which is great, but I would have done it anyway."* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"It's a good reward but doesn't make people do it."* – Male 'Skipper' aged 25-29

How did you find the registration process?

Generally the 'Skippers' found the registration process simple:

*"Yeah, easy to sign up"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"You just sign a card, no worries"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 30-39

However, many of them commented on the inconsistencies in registration processes between venues:

*"Some don't have any signing up"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"In some places you get all this paperwork and you just say forget it, I'll just buy my soft drink"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 30-39

What do you like about the 'Skipper' program?

Some participants liked the program because it was cheap and convenient:

*"The free soft drinks, sometimes they are dearer than alcohol"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 25-29

*"It's cheaper; you don't have to pay for a cab or drinks"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 25-29

Others stated that it gave them an excuse not to drink or to avoid the negative consequences of drinking:

*"Gives you an excuse not to drink when you don't want to"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 25-29

*"When you don't want to drink, you can just say "I'm the 'Skipper'" and your friends want give you a hard time"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 25-29

*"No hangover"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 30-39

Some participants specifically focussed on the safety aspects of the program, such as:

*"...get home safe"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 25-29

*"It's good not to drink and drive"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 25-29

Would you be a 'Skipper' again? Why/Why not?

The 'Skippers' generally indicated that they would keep using the program in the future. Some even stated that they would do it more often:

*"I'll keep doing it, already did, might even do it more now"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 40-49

More specifically, a number of participants indicated that reward and recognition was important:

*"I think it's really good, we deserve to get free soft drink...and just recognition"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

*"It's good, I mean I would do it anyway, it's just better now"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 30-39

*"Yeah, it makes 'not drinking' not so lame"* – Male 'Skipper' aged 25-29

Furthermore, other participants reported that they would continue to use the program if improvements were made, such as:

*"As long as it's easy to register and you know it's on wherever you go, then yeah, I'll keep doing it"* – Female 'Skipper' aged 17-24

**Discussion**

Generally, participants in the focus groups were positive about 'Skipper' and most were aware of the program either via personal involvement or the associated media coverage. They seemed to understand the nature of the program and discussed some possible reasons for the program being important, such as encouraging people not to drink and drive and the reduction in crashes.

The 'Skippers' reported a variety of facilitating factors for being a 'Skipper' such as it being cheaper, safer, providing them an excuse not to drink, and avoid the negative consequences of drinking. Most of the 'Skippers' indicated that they were often designated drivers before the introduction of the program, however they believed that the reward and recognition was important and may encourage them to volunteer to be designated drivers more often. It should be noted that there were somewhat inconsistent views regarding the use of soft drink as an incentive. Many participants stated that it had no impact on their decision to be a 'Skipper', yet thought it was essential to maintain this aspect in any future programs.

Despite the positive views about the program, there were suggested barriers to the programs effectiveness. Some questioned whether 'Skipper' would influence people in becoming designated drivers. In particular, they believed that some individuals want to drink alcohol on every social occasion, either out of desire or social pressure to do so. Other participants believed that some people do not plan ahead enough to be a designated driver. Some participants also questioned the overall impact of 'Skipper' on drink driving. Some thought that 'Skipper' may reduce drink driving by providing another good way to get the anti-drink driving message out into the public arena. However, many felt that 'hard-core' individuals were too resistant to change due to alcohol dependency, a culture of drinking, and peer pressure.

Both 'Skippers' and 'Non-Skippers' had suggestions for improvements to the program to minimise potential barriers. Some thought the registration process should be simplified, and consistently implemented across venues. Many also suggested that more advertising was needed, especially about where the program was running. There was overwhelming support for the 'Skipper' program to be expanded into every venue in the area.

It should be noted that it is possible that due to participation bias, the focus group participants did not represent all patrons in Mackay and their views. However, the focus participants' characteristics were very similar to those of the outcome evaluation survey participants. These participants were recruited from eight representative drinking venues in Mackay, and with the high response rate for these surveys

(89%, [12]) a strong bias is unlikely. Even if the responses were not entirely representative of all patrons' views, the focus groups still provided valuable information about the barriers and facilitators of the 'Skipper' program. This in turn will assist in the improvement of the program in Mackay, as well as for the implementation of 'Skipper' or other similar designated driver programs elsewhere.

### Conclusion

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to confirm the effectiveness of the 'Skipper' program, the results illustrate the strong support for the initiative among this sample of people who frequent drinking venues. As such, there is a need for ongoing enhancement of designated driver programs, accompanied by further evaluation to confirm its effectiveness in reducing drink driving and associated road trauma.

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