

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

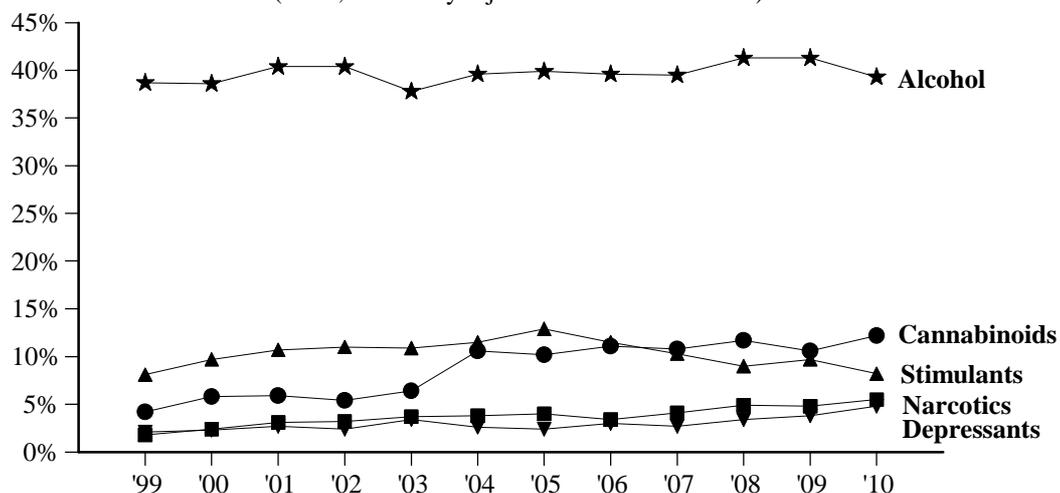
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Six-State Study Finds Drugs Other Than Alcohol Increasingly Detected in Fatally Injured Drivers; Cannabinoids Most Prevalent Other Drug Detected

The prevalence of drugs other than alcohol in fatally injured drivers increased significantly from 1999 to 2010, according to an analysis of substances detected in drivers who were killed in a motor vehicle crash¹ in six US states² that routinely perform toxicological testing on drivers in such crashes. While the prevalence of alcohol detected in drivers remained stable at around 39% over the period, the prevalence of other drugs increased from 16.6% in 1999 to 28.3% in 2010 (data not shown). The greatest increases were for cannabinoids and narcotics, both of which approximately tripled over the period (from 4.2% to 12.2% and from 1.8% to 5.5%, respectively), followed by depressants which increased from 2.1% to 4.8%. Since 2007, cannabinoids have been the most prevalent drug other than alcohol detected in fatally injured drivers. While the authors acknowledge that the presence of other drugs is not necessarily an indication of impairment, they conclude that the “results suggest that drugged driving, specifically driving under the influence of cannabinol and narcotics, may be playing an increasing role in fatal motor vehicle crashes. To control the ongoing epidemic of drugged driving, it is imperative to strengthen and expand drug testing and intervention programs for drivers” (p. 6).

Percentage of Fatally Injured Drivers Testing Positive for Alcohol and Other Drugs*, 1999-2010

(n=23,591 fatally injured drivers in six states)



¹“Drivers who survived for more than one hour after the crash . . . or with missing data on time of death . . . were excluded from this study because of concerns about the accuracy and reliability of drug testing data for these drivers” (p. 2).

²While drug testing is performed on only approximately 30% of fatally injured drivers nationwide, six states (CA, HI, IL, NH, RI, WV) performed toxicological testing on more than 80% of their fatally injured drivers. In this study, 90.9% of the drivers who died within one hour of a crash in these six states had toxicological test data.

*Excluded from this graph is the category “Other” which includes hallucinogens, PCP, anabolic steroids, inhalants, and other drugs. The prevalence of these drugs increased 55%, from 3.8% in 1999 to 5.9% in 2010.

NOTES: Data are from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS). The presence of up to 4 drugs, including alcohol, was recorded for each driver.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Brady, J.E. and Li, G., “Trends in Alcohol and Other Drugs Detected in Fatally Injured Drivers in the United States, 199-2010,” *American Journal of Epidemiology*, Advance Access, 1/29/2014. For more information, contact Dr. Guohua Li at gl2240@columbia.edu.