



**UTM**  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

GRADUATE SUCCESS ATTRIBUTE (UHMT1012-44)

**“CASE STUDY ON DRUNK DRIVING IN MALAYSIA”**

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## **DRUNK DRIVING IN MALAYSIA**

“I can handle my alcohol,” “I am confident in my driving,” those are mostly the excuses given by those who get caught driving under influence of alcohol. Unfortunately, the ignorance cost someone’s life. For the past few years, there are public outrage among Malaysia citizens due to the accidents caused by drunk drivers. Many were in disbelief as Malaysia is known as an Islamic country, but there is no use to cry over spilt milk.

Drunk driving or driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol is the act of taking the wheel on any motor vehicle after intake of alcohol where the driver is unable to operate the vehicle safely (Walsh et al., 2004). As stated in the definition, the vehicle involved is not only cars, but it includes any vehicle that has its own mechanism and can be used on the roads. So, yes, to the extent of electric bicycle.

According to the statistics provided by Royal Malaysian Police, in 2020, up until June, there were 195,358 road accidents happened in Malaysia. The number is alternatively lower than the data during January until June of 2019, maybe because of the implement of movement control order due to COVID-19. Those numbers also include the number for fatal accidents which are 2,072. Out of the figures, six of the road accidents occurred because of drivers who were driving under influence of alcohol or drugs. The number easily wins over the road accidents occurred because of the same reason in the whole year 2019. For some people, the number may be not that big if compared to fatal accidents that happened because of other reasons, but it is a worrying problem.

In this modernisation world, it is easy to get news everywhere and most of the time, the news can reach us faster than the time it shows up on the television. Every time a drunk driving accident happens in Malaysia, people always blame it on certain races because they are holier-than-thou. Insults were thrown, but people need to realise these incidents happens because of the individuals themselves, not their races. Although Malaysia is deemed as an Islamic and a small country, but as the country allowed other non-Muslim citizens to drink alcohol, Malaysia is the tenth largest alcohol consumer in the world. According to a study by Maniam (1994) on 562 respondents, 70% of 253 Chinese drink alcohol, and 6% were heavy drinkers – drank more than 14 units of alcohol per week. Meanwhile, 42% of 57 Indians drink alcohol with none of them were heavy drinkers, and 11% of 236 Malays which 22% were heavy drinkers. Even in another study done by Mutalip et al. (2014), this trend seems to be continuous as Chinese tops

the number of drinker, followed by Indian and lastly Malay. Thus, what caused alcohol consumption among Malaysian?

Malaysia is well-known as a multicultural country, in some cultures, alcohol is regularly used. It can be said that different religions and cultures led to the statistics above. In Islam, the believers are prohibited from drinking alcohol and majority of Malay in Malaysia are Muslims, but not all are adherent to the religion's rule thus the small number of drinkers. Alcohol consumption during festive seasons is definitely higher than daily basis, given that Malaysia has multiple celebrations considering the number of races and religions – from Chinese New Year, Diwali, Hari Kaamatan to Christmas. Particularly for those who lives in Sabah and Sarawak, they are more prone towards alcohol during their festive seasons because they usually produce their own alcohol beverages which contains high alcohol level than the usual alcohol sold in the market.

Other than that, people drink alcohol to cope with stress. Life is not always bright, on some days, it might turn dark and depressing. People have many ways of releasing their stress, either it is doing their hobbies or talking about it to other people. But, for some people, they depend on alcohol. When people in stress, human's body responds to it with the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, and to fight it back, the human's body release a hormone called cortisol (Spencer & Hutchison, 1999). Alcohol helps on to increase the release of cortisol which then contribute on the release of higher adrenaline. It makes people feel braver, but at the same time it effects the body system badly. During the euphoric moment after alcohol consumption, people live in their own world, away from the harsh reality. It may be just a moment, but it provides a sense of peacefulness for some.

Although it is a common sense not to drive after drinking alcohol, but some people do not have a good judgement sense when it comes to this. Among the reasons on why people drive under the influence of alcohol is that they feel confident with themselves. It is a well-known fact that when an individual is intoxicated, they have poor judgement skill. Thus, when it comes to driving, it is more dangerous because there are rules to be followed on the roads, from the traffic lights to changing lanes. People who drink do not have sense of reality as for some will always admit they are not drunk, when in fact, they do. For some heavy drinkers, they are confident that they can handle themselves well if they have not drink until their limit. The confidence is more dangerous when it comes to drinking with their peers, as they feel the need to keep their pride within them (Adler & Adler, 1998). Actually, it is egoism hidden

behind the name of pride. People will try to hide the fact that they are drunk to win against their peers to the extent of driving by themselves. Indeed, peer pressure does exist even during adulthood.

In addition to what has been said, people also drunk driving because they do not have alternative way of returning to their home. This may be the case if they stay somewhere in rural areas, but mostly the cases of drunk driving are in urban areas (Nordin, 2020; Zolkepli, 2020). Urban areas are more at risk of car accident as there are more vehicles on the roads, and the volume of population is also higher. As more people from rural areas start immigrating to urban areas in search for new hope like job and study, urban areas keep welcoming new residents to their busy world. According to statistics provided by Department of Statistics Malaysia (2018) for population from the year 2016 to 2018, urban areas like Johor Bahru and Kuala Lumpur experienced surge increase of population. There are many ways available to commute in urban areas such as bus, taxis and even e-hailing. However, some public vehicles' drivers avoid from having drunk customers on their vehicles because they are afraid of any possible commotion, and there are also those who have wrong stereotype towards people who drink. In result, these people decided on just to drive their vehicles even knowing that they are drunk.

To avoid more life-threatening accidents from happening due to drunk driving, we must start preventing it because prevention is better than cure. To start it with, the government must make a stricter law. This act is considered as an offence in most countries, including Malaysia. Under the law of Malaysia, there is The Road Transport Act 1987 consisted of multiple sections solely for driving under influence. After much pressure from the public, on 23 October 2020, the government passed the new Road Transport Act (Amendment) 2020 that implemented heavier punishment for DUI offenders. As comparison, the prescribed limit of alcohol is lower in the amendment. In 100 millilitres (ml) of breath, the limit proportion of alcohol is 35 microgrammes (mg) in the old act, meanwhile the limit is lowered to 22 mg in the amendment. Aside from that, the penalties are more severe as the fine is increased from not less than RM1,000 and not more than RM6,000 to minimum of RM10,000 and maximum RM30,000. The imprisonment term also become longer from maximum 12 months to maximum two years. The new amendment got various responds from the citizen with some are relieved with the thought of not having any drunk drivers on the road, and some who pitied the possible offenders as it seems to them that it will burden the offenders. Mayhap because the amendment is still not well-known among the citizens even after it has made into the news and headlines, there are still drunk driving cases happening.

Apart from that, the service of designated driver could be introduced. Designated driver is a sober individual who would drive the client to home using the client's car. This service is popular in countries that have drinking culture like South Korea and United States of America. Even though those countries have this service, it does not mean they do not have DUI cases as their DUI cases are higher than Malaysia's. As e-hailing becomes more on demand, people can easily book the service from the tip of their finger, but there are still people who uncomfortable of leaving their vehicle at somewhere that they might not remember after sobering up from alcohol. Some people also uncomfortable to ask for help from their friend or family to pick them up. Hence, this is where the designated driver service comes to the rescue. Nonetheless, it sure comes with risks as the driver is a stranger that we do not know, there also possibility of something bad to happens. To protect the users, a company should be made to regulate the designated driver service just like how there are Grab and Ezcab for e-hailing.

In a nutshell, drunk driving is an irresponsible act happened because of the individual themselves. The act has caused many losses of lives and loves over the years. Those who drink alcohol beverage need to drink responsibly and those who do not drink, need to stay away from it. Ignorance will not help ourselves. So, before the milk is spilt, it is better to handle it properly so no one will cry in the end.

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