

why do we need to have strict laws regarding drunk driving?

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Case Background

In April 2011, Kenneth Belew was driving under the influence of alcohol and rammed his car into a car. The ramming of the car into the car caused the car to flip over multiple times and hit a metal railing as well. The high speed caused the vehicle to flip over multiple lanes of traffic. As a result of his drunk driving, two passengers passed away. He and the other three passengers were treated for minor injuries.

The Accident Scene and Admission of Guilt

When police came to the scene of the accident, Belew was holding a body in his arms and crying. All the while he kept shouting that he was guilty and that he should be put in jail. Belew repeatedly kept shouting that he was responsible for the deaths. While one girl passed away on the spot, the other girl succumbed to her injuries in a hospital where she was being treated.

Charges and Sentencing

Belew pleaded guilty to various charges including the two charges of motor vehicle homicide. Belew's breath analyzer test revealed that he was twice the legal limit and driving more than 91 mph. The judge sentenced him to six years in prison. Furthermore, Belew was to give up his license for fifteen years and complete twenty-five hours of community service every year. The possibility of parole was only available after two and a half years.

Public Reactions to the Judgment

Since we now know the facts of the case and the judgment, opposing views are generated by the families of the victim, the family of the culprit, and the general public. Some have termed the sentence as a slap on the wrist. The mother of one of the girls said, "The culprit was being treated as a teenager, while clearly he was an adult." (Cox, 2012). Others have called for reforms in the system. They argue that a policy needs to be devised to reduce such incidents. The family of the culprit has termed the sentence as being too severe. They feel that Belew was well aware of the dangers of drunk driving. Therefore, it is possible that other factors were involved in the incident. Belew's uncle

said, "They've been lectured, they've been scolded, do not drink and drive." (Valencia, 2011)

Evaluation of Responsibility

While going through the case and various articles on the case, I have formed an opinion myself. Belew's actions were not those of a mature person. Nor were the actions of the passengers with him in the car. All of them had been drinking heavily, which meant that their mental capacity had been diminished. Instead of pooling in a car, they should have opted for a cab or some other service. The fact that all of them were drunk meant that it was a recipe for disaster. Furthermore, the two female passengers' decision not to wear seatbelts should be taken into account. They put themselves in further danger than they already were. It is evident from the fact that the passengers who had been wearing seatbelts suffered only minor injuries in the car. Moreover, Belew had previous run-ins with the police on drinking charges, which is something all of them would know.

In the midst of their journey, Belew began overspeeding. Later, he hit the brakes at high speed, which caused the car to skid and smash into a curb. It caused the car to overturn and flip multiple times. In the process, the two girls lost their lives. We must ascertain the motive behind Belew's decision to apply the brakes in the middle of the road. Did he panic, which caused him to apply the brakes, or was something else on the road? No evidence shows that another car, animal, etc., was on the road, which could have caused him to apply the brakes. So, we know that the decision to apply the brakes was made in panic maybe because of excessive speed.

As police and other emergency services arrived, Belew was crying uncontrollably while holding the body of a girl. This shows that immediately after the crash he had come to his senses and was aware of the gravity of the situation. He entered a guilty plea which could account for his short sentence. However, in my opinion, the sentence is justified for a number of reasons. One reason is that, more or less, the passengers were complicit in the whole ordeal. They knew that they had been drinking, and by allowing another drunk person to drive, they themselves sealed their fate. Moreover, the girls who died had not been wearing a seatbelt when the car crashed. This meant that they were as negligent as the passengers who had been wearing a seat. Later, Belew also took responsibility for his actions (Firestone, 2011). Considering all these factors, I believe that the court's decision was justified. Belew did break the law, but the dead girls were, in a way, accomplices to the events that unfolded. It would not be equitable to hold him responsible for all the events that ensued that day.

The Need for Stricter Drunk-Driving Laws

We need strict laws regarding drunk driving to avoid such regrettable incidents. Vehicles should be fitted with ignition interlocks, which measure a person's alcohol levels. Higher levels would automatically stop the car from starting. Furthermore, we need school-based programs and media campaigns to discuss the evils of drunk driving.