






Drink-driving media campaigns

Using the media to persuade individuals to avoid drink-driving or prevent others from doing so.

First published

1 February 2015

Effect scale	Quality of evidence				
	Effect Impact on crime	Mechanism How it works	Moderator Where it works	Implementation How to do it	Economic cost What it costs
 Some reduction	 Low	 Moderate	No information	 Moderate	 Low

Focus of the intervention

Mass media campaigns focus on persuading individuals to avoid drink-driving or prevent others from doing so. These campaigns promote themes such as:

- fear of arrest and legal consequences of arrest
- fear of harm to self, others or property
- encouraging positive social norms
- stigmatising drinkers as being irresponsible

Messages relayed in media campaigns range from abstinence to moderation, or recommend specific responsible behaviours to prevent others from driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol.

This narrative summary is based on one systematic review (covering eight studies).

Effect – how effective is it?

There is some evidence that the intervention has reduced crime, but overall the intervention has not had a statistically significant effect on crime.

Specifically, the evidence suggests that mass media campaigns have no overall impact on either alcohol related crashes or the proportion of drivers driving under the influence of alcohol although some individual studies suggest a decrease.

There was no evidence of a backfire effect or negative consequences in any of the studies reviewed.

How strong is the evidence?

??The review is based on eight studies carried out in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA. Although the review was systematic, many forms of bias that could influence the study conclusions remain.

The review did not quantify an overall effect for unanticipated outcomes such as displacement caused by the intervention.

Mechanism – how does it work?

The review notes that mass media campaigns increase awareness of legal as well as social and health consequences of driving under the influence of alcohol. This increased awareness leads to changes in attitudes and knowledge as well as social norms and peer influences, and to positive changes in driving behaviour.

The review authors ?note that fear based campaigns are controversial – while some level of anxiety arousal is seen as desirable, intense anxiety can cause some people to ignore or discount the campaign messages.

The desired change in attitude and behaviour can be encouraged when the anxiety-arousing message is accompanied by specific information about how people can protect themselves.

Moderators – in which contexts does it work best?

There was no discussion in the review about the specific contexts in which mass media campaigns work. Review authors note that mass media campaigns are likely to be more effective when they are reinforced by other efforts such as law enforcement activity, grassroots activities, and other media messages relating to drinking and driving. ??

Implementation – what can be said about implementing this initiative?

Review authors note that:

- The design of the message should be based firmly on theory and empirical evidence instead of so-called experts with limited knowledge of the research literature. They also recommend message pre-testing to increase effectiveness. ?
- ??Highly threatening messages tend to divide the audience. Policy makers should, therefore, place more emphasis on suggesting suitable coping strategies to address the underlying threat portrayed instead of relying simply on the emotive appeal.
- Paid advertising campaigns are recommended over public service announcements in order to maintain control over placement and maximise exposure.
- Mass media campaigns work best when they produce an optimal amount of anxiety; are of a high quality with strategic placement to ensure the target audience sees, comprehends and attends to the message; and have adequate resources and public support.

Economic considerations – how much might it cost?

Economic analysis of campaign effects (three studies) indicated that the societal benefits were greater than the costs. Individual studies estimate the costs and benefits of mass media campaigns to range between:

- \$403,174 (AUD) per month (for first 23 months) for the campaign in Victoria (Australia) totalling \$23 million between 1989 and 1992. Estimated savings from medical costs, productivity losses, pain and suffering, and property damage were \$8,324,532 per month.

- \$454,060 and \$322,660 for (full 6 month campaigns) for the Wichita and Kansas campaigns respectively in the USA. Estimated savings from averted costs of insurance administration, premature funerals, court and legal expenses, medical payments, property damage, rehabilitation and employers losses were estimated to be \$3,341,305 and \$3,676,399 respectively.
- \$7million (NZD) per year for the campaign in New Zealand. Estimated savings were not calculated.

General considerations

- The review authors admit that the studies reviewed represent a highly select sample of high-quality, high-intensity campaigns and, as such, may not reflect general intervention effectiveness.
- Some authors suggest that the association between mass media campaigns and observed decreases in alcohol related crashes may be more due to legislative changes rather than the direct effects of the campaigns on people's behaviour.
- It is unlikely that all potential messages are equally effective at changing drinking and driving behaviour – some might not be effective and others could be counterproductive. Thus, effective pre-testing of messages is an important consideration for implementation of mass media campaigns.

Summary

Overall, the evidence suggests that mass media campaigns have no impact on either alcohol related crashes or the proportion of drivers driving under the influence of alcohol although some studies suggest a decrease.

The evidence suggests that well planned and well executed mass media campaigns that attain adequate audience exposure, and are implemented with other prevention activities such as enhanced law enforcement, may contribute to a reduction in alcohol impaired driving and alcohol related crashes.

It also suggests that such campaigns are cost effective and the resulting social benefits outweigh costs.

Reviews

Review one

Reference

- Elder R., Shults R., Sleet D., Nicols J., Thompson R. and Rajab W: (2004) [Effectiveness of Mass Media Campaigns for Reducing Drinking and Driving and Alcohol-Involved Crashes: A Systematic Review](#), American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 27:1; 57-65 ?

Summary prepared by

This narrative was prepared by UCL Jill Dando Institute and was co-funded by the College of Policing and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). ESRC grant title: 'University Consortium for Evidence-Based Crime Reduction'. Grant reference: ES/L007223/1.

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