

Summary:

Evaluation of the road safety campaign "Being dead isn't cool"

The goal of the present study was to evaluate the road safety campaign "Being dead isn't cool", which was implemented the autumn of 2005 in junior high schools in three Norwegian counties. Pupils generally evaluated the campaign positively, but significant differences were revealed in subgroups of the sample. Neither the campaign in itself nor group work/discussions before and after the campaign contributed to significant changes in attitudes, intentions and behaviours.

Background and method

"Being dead isn't cool" is a road safety campaign aimed at 10th graders, i.e., adolescents aged between 15 and 16 years. The main element in the campaign is a 90 minutes long theatre performance. The performance aims to provide a realistic picture of the consequences of a serious road traffic accident where adolescents are involved, primarily presented by one person seriously injured in such an accident, one person from the police, and a third person of significance (e.g., a nurse or a well-known athlete). In addition, the campaign consists of a section of group work/discussions before and after the performance, where the main focus is on road safety, mainly related to issues raised in the performance. The overall goal of the campaign is to make adolescents aware of the road accident risk and of the consequences of risky behaviour on the road, and to create "healthy" attitudes towards road safety. The campaign was implemented nationwide in 1987, but until now the effect of the campaign had not been evaluated. The purpose of this study was to examine:

- (i) how the pupils in the three counties where the campaign was implemented, evaluated "Being dead..."
- (ii) whether the performance contributed to changes in attitudes, intentions, or behaviour
- (iii) if the group work/discussion before and after the performance contributed to change the pupils' attitudes, intentions or behaviour

Being conducted in autumn 2005 and in spring 2006, the study was designed as a before and after study with a test group and a comparison group. The test group consisted of 2323 pupils in 10th grade from three counties in Norway (Akershus, Oppland and Telemark) where "Being dead..." was implemented. The comparison group consisted of 1062 pupils in 10th grade from two counties in Norway (Buskerud and Hedmark) where the campaign was not implemented. Both groups received a questionnaire before the campaign was conducted. Half of the pupils

received a follow-up questionnaire 1-2 months after the campaign (follow-up study 1) while the other half received a follow-up questionnaire 3-4 months after the campaign was conducted (follow-up study 2). The questionnaires contained measures of attitudes towards road safety, towards seat belt use, towards speaking out against speeding while being a car passenger. They also measured attitudes towards illegally trimming the moped/motorcycle engine, intentions to wear seat belts, to speak out against speeding and to conduct illegal trimming of mopeds or motorcycles. Measures of self-reported tendency to speak out against speeding and seat belt use were also included. In addition, the pupils in the test group received some questions regarding "Being dead...". The response rate for the test group was 90% at baseline, 85% at follow-up study 1, and 82% at follow-up study 2. The corresponding response rates in the comparison group were 65%, 63% and 56%.

The pupils' evaluation of "Being dead isn't cool"

The pupils generally had a positive evaluation of the performance, they identified themselves with the person injured in a road accident, and the performance succeeded in activating feelings among the pupils. Moreover, many pupils reported that the performance made them think differently about traffic safety. Significant differences were found between subgroups of the sample. Girls evaluated the performance more positively than boys, they identified themselves more strongly with the injured person, and they were more emotionally affected by the performance than boys were. There were also significant differences between the three test counties. Pupils in Oppland county evaluated the performance more positively than pupils in the counties of Akershus and Telemark, they identified themselves more strongly with the injured person, and they were more emotionally affected by the performance than were pupils in the other test counties.

Regarding the group work/discussions before and after the performance, girls clearly had a more positive evaluation of this than the boys. Pupils in Oppland county reported having used significantly more time discussing road safety issues before and after the performance than pupils in Akershus and Telemark county, and pupils in Oppland county evaluated the group work/discussions more positively than pupils in the other test counties.

The performance's impact on attitudes, intentions and behaviour

The results suggest that the performance in itself did not contribute to significant changes in the pupils' attitudes towards road safety, attitudes towards seat belt use, attitudes towards speaking out against speeding while being a passenger or their attitudes towards trimming the moped/motorcycle engine. Moreover, the results did not suggest that seeing the performance lead to any significant changes in intentions or behaviour. This is true for the sample as a whole as well as for its subgroups.

The performance can be viewed as a necessary point of reference for a dialogue concerning road safety, and road safety was the main focus in the group

work/discussion before and after the performance. Through this dialogue it is assumed that the pupils to a larger extent are able to elaborate the message given, a factor which might be decisive for a campaign having effect or not. Other aspects that might explain why group work/discussions seem to be important, is that the message is communicated personally during this activity, and that the pupils have an opportunity to ask questions etc. With this in mind, it was examined whether pupils who participated in group work/discussions before and after the performance had a different development of attitudes, intentions and behaviour as opposed to those who did not participate in such discussions. The results showed that participation in group work/discussions did not have a significant impact on attitudes, intentions or behaviour.

Conclusion

The study suggests that the pupils generally had a positive evaluation of "Being dead isn't cool", but that the performance and group work/discussion before and after the performance were not sufficient to create "healthy" attitudes, intentions and behaviour among the pupils. Based on results from previous research, one might assume that the effect of "Being dead isn't cool" might be improved by including police control measures along with the campaign, e.g. roadside controls related to moped/motorcycle trimming or to seat belt use.