



Media Campaigns

Toolkit technical report

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August 2022

This report is produced in collaboration with staff from the Campbell Collaboration Secretariat. It is a derivative product, which summarises information from Campbell systematic reviews, and other reviews, to support evidence-informed decision making’.

Media campaigns: YEF Technical Report

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Plain language summary

This report assesses the effect of media campaigns on children and young people’s involvement in crime and violence. Mass media campaigns are defined as “information or messages aimed at large numbers of people, through media such as audio and audio-visual recordings or broadcasts; print; mobile devices; and the Internet” (Bala et al., 2013; Cassidy et al., 2016). Examples of media campaigns in the UK are the *Zero Tolerance Campaign* and *No Knives Better Lives*.

The report is based on the systematic review by Cassidy et al. (2016) titled ‘Brief report on a systematic review of youth violence prevention through media campaigns: Does the limited yield of strong evidence imply methodological challenges or absence of effect?’. The authors searched for evaluations of media campaigns that addressed outcomes of violence amongst youth aged between 10 and 29 years old.

Media campaigns are expected to raise awareness. In the case of youth crime there is a presumed deterrence effect both from the likelihood of getting caught and the consequences of violence. Media campaigns may also play an information role, such as about county lines (where drug dealers in major cities establish networks for the supply and sale of drugs to users in towns and rural areas, using other people, often involving children and young people, to carry, store, and sell the drugs).

Cassidy et al. (2016) only found six evaluations of effectiveness that met their inclusion criteria. Five of the six evaluations were conducted in the US, with the remaining evaluation being conducted in the Netherlands. There was an insufficient number of evaluations reporting comparable outcomes and thus a meta-analysis could not be undertaken. We are therefore unable to report an effect size.

However, a recent study reports two experiments with children and young people in the UK finding that exposure to messages about violence increases awareness of death but has no effect on the intention to carry a knife (Hobson et al., 2022). This finding is supported by a qualitative study which discussed knife images with 20 young people, which suggested they may be more, not less, likely to carry a knife as a result of viewing such images.

No cost data are available.

There is a need for more primary studies examining the effectiveness of different media channels and messages.

Objective and approach

The objective of this technical report is to review the evidence on the effect of media campaigns on children and young people's involvement in crime and violence.

This technical report is based on a recent systematic review by Cassidy et al. (2016). The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to inform the selection of systematic reviews.

Inclusion criteria

Included in this technical report were systematic reviews and meta-analyses of the effects of media campaigns aimed at preventing and/or reducing the involvement of children and young people in crime and violence. Eligible reviews focused on outcomes such as youth antisocial behaviour, juvenile delinquency, and/or offending.

Exclusion criteria

Reviews that examined media campaigns that did not aim to reduce or prevent youth involvement in crime and violence were excluded. For example, reviews of public health campaigns to promote healthy eating or lifestyles practices (e.g., smoking prevention, Brinn et al., 2010).

Outcomes

Cassidy et al. (2016) searched for evaluations of media campaigns that addressed outcomes of violence amongst youth aged between 10 and 29 years old. Violence was defined as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (Cassidy et al., 2016, p. 23; Flannery et al., 2007).

Description of interventions

Cassidy et al. (2016) reviewed mass media campaigns as violence prevention interventions. Mass media campaigns are defined as "information or messages aimed at large numbers of people,

through media such as audio and audio-visual recordings or broadcasts; print; mobile devices; and the Internet” (Bala et al., 2013; Cassidy et al., 2016).

Several examples are provided in this review, but little detail about the content of these campaigns is included. In the UK, the first mass media campaign was the *Zero Tolerance Campaign* which addressed sexual abuse of women and girls (Cassidy et al., 2016). The campaign used billboards, posters, and newspaper to try and change social norms around violence that may condone or facilitate sexual abuse of women and girls. However, Cassidy et al., (2016) did not find any evaluation of the effectiveness of this mass media campaign.

Other interventions include *No Knives Better Lives*, a national programme in Scotland which uses early preventive interventions to address the drivers of youth violence, including media campaigns in both schools and the community.¹ In the US, examples of mass media campaigns included, the *Stop the Violence* campaign by Jive Records in 1989, the *Walk Away from Violence* campaign in Wayne County in 1991, and the *Family Violence: Breaking the Chains* campaign implemented in Boston in 1992 (Cassidy et al., 2016).

Some mass media campaigns may involve documentary films or videos (e.g., O’Donohue et al., 2003). For example, Winkel and de Kleuver (1997) showed secondary school participants either a victim-focused or perpetrator-focused documentary on the impact of sexual violence. Other campaigns used television and radio or print media in schools (Swaim & Kelly, 2008). Some of the media campaign materials aimed to direct the target audience to a website where more information about an issue, such as dating violence, was available (e.g., Rothman et al., 2006).

Theory of change/presumed causal mechanisms

Mass media campaigns are commonly used in public health domains. Cassidy et al. (2016) outline that these approaches aim to change societal norms to affect behavioural change. There is very limited evidence on the effectiveness of media campaigns to reduce or prevent violence. However, the presumed causal mechanism is that by raising awareness and increasing knowledge of a particular problem a media campaign can impact and change behaviour.

It is also possible that media campaigns could have a deterrent effect if the content focused on increasing awareness about the consequences or sanctions of involvement in crime and violence. Media campaigns to tackle youth violence, such as *No Knives Better Lives*, focus on knives, showing

the reality of being stabbed. However, it is also plausible that raising awareness about a specific problem could lead to an increase in reports made to the police. Therefore, an increase in official records of a particular crime could follow a media campaign but this would not necessarily reflect an increase in the actual prevalence of criminal activity.

Evidence base

Descriptive overview

Cassidy et al. (2016) only found six evaluations that met their inclusion criteria. Five of the six evaluations were conducted in the US, with the remaining evaluation being conducted in the Netherlands. There was an insufficient number of evaluations reporting comparable outcomes and thus a meta-analysis could not be undertaken. The evaluations included in the review had between 198 and 1,911 participants from middle and secondary schools. One evaluation included undergraduate students from a university campus. A broad range of outcomes were reported by the six evaluations, for example, evaluations included rape myth acceptance, knowledge and attitudes towards teen dating violence, acceptance, and intent for interpersonal violence.

Assessment of the evidence rating

Cassidy et al. (2016) did not compute a meta-analysis and so an impact estimate could not be reported. Thus, an assessment of the evidence rating was not undertaken.

Impact

Summary impact measure

The review that informs this technical report did not compute a meta-analysis and so an impact estimate cannot be reported. To our best knowledge, there are currently no existing meta-analyses on the effectiveness of media campaigns to reduce or prevent children and young people's involvement in crime and violence.

UK studies

A randomised trial conducted in the UK examined the effects of exposing youth to the mortality risk from carrying a knife on their willingness to carry a knife and the perceived benefits from doing so through two experiments (Hobson, 2022).

The first experiment was conducted with young people aged 18-25. The treatment group were shown four tweets mainly conveying that carrying a knife increases the risk of being stabbed

yourself and the devastating consequences for their family, and the control group received tweets on other current campaigns such as sugary drinks. Although the treatment group were more aware of the possibility of death ('mortality salience') it did not affect their willingness to carry a knife.

The second experiment was conducted with young people aged 14-18. The study design was the same as that for the older age group. The same results were found of an increased awareness of death but no change in intentions to carry a knife.

Implementation

Two studies were identified that provide information about the implementation of media campaigns addressing the involvement of children and young people in violence.

A process evaluation of a social media campaign in Colchester, Essex (UK), to deter young people from getting involved in county lines drug carrying and selling, found that whilst the tweets reached a large number of the target audience there was low engagement with the content (Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit). Suggested reasons were that the media campaign ads were an unwanted distraction from their social media viewing, that they had no interest in learning more about county lines, and that they did not recognise the brand behind the message.

A study in Glasgow discussed images of knives, of the sort found in the media and campaigns such as by No Knives Better Lives, with 20 youth, half drawn from a low violence area and half from a high violence area. There was no evidence that such an approach may have the desired effect. Three themes were identified. First, such images may actually encourage the carrying of knives – in the words of one boy *'It's going to lead to more people carrying knives cause then they have a sort of feeling that they need to protect themselves'* (Cogan et al., 2021: 17). Second, there were differences between children in high and low violence. The former saw knives as part of the way of life in their communities: *'Just, you're brought up being told there's knife crime.... And that's just how it is. It's not right but... I'm not surprised by it. It's not a hidden crime. People know about it'* (female respondent; Cogan et al., 2021: 14). Finally, there was a feeling that the images reinforced stereotypes, and that police and the media have other motives for showing images of knives: *'I think that media portrayals can affect a narrative in such a big way. They can completely change public perceptions of someone, and they would maybe use these for their political agenda'* (female respondent, Cogan et al., 2021: 18).

Cost analysis

No studies were found with a cost analysis.

What do we need to know? What don't we know?

The available evidence suggests that information campaigns may not be effective. However, the evidence base is small and has not been quantitatively synthesized. The current need is for more studies, with sufficient sample size, which explore different channels and messages. The content for such media campaigns should be developed in consultation with the target audience.

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