

Population Health

title	A Process Evaluation of the National Drug Awareness Campaign
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INTRODUCTION

In response to the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 a national mass media awareness campaign was undertaken from May 2003 to December 2005 with the aim of highlighting the facts about drug misuse and increasing awareness of drugs problems. The campaign slogan was '*Drugs - there are answers*' and messages were disseminated via electronic and hard copy communication mechanisms and a community-based initiative. While the mass media have been used extensively to communicate drug misuse prevention and harm reduction messages the effect that these campaigns have on audiences has long been debated and warrants evaluation to inform future developments.

METHODOLOGY

A process evaluation was carried out to evaluate campaign development and delivery. Research objectives included: to assess the effectiveness of mass media campaigns in drugs prevention and harm reduction as reported in the literature, to make explicit the campaign development process and to determine how the aims of the campaign were interpreted and negotiated by stakeholders. A literature review was carried out and a qualitative approach to data collection undertaken with a total of 94 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders at five points of time during campaign dissemination. Key stakeholders included representation from the National Advisory Committee on Drugs, the Drugs Strategy Unit, Health Promotion and Policy Unit, Department of Education and Science, Garda Síochána, regional drugs coordinators, HSE drugs education officers and the advertising agency involved. Documentary data was also collated and used to inform the results.

RESULTS

Criteria for campaign success identified from the literature comprised: apply and extend relevant theory, well defined target audience, message development, mix multiple media with other components, long term commitment and evaluation including formative. The National Drugs Awareness Campaign can be seen to have fallen short of these criteria that may have reduced the latent effectiveness of the campaign. The importance of planning and management emerged as paramount, with effective and timely communication mechanisms as key factors. Other areas identified by participants include the necessity for adequate funding from the outset, centrality of time-frames, time commitments, engaging with appropriate and skilled expertise and embracing the principles of participatory decision-making.

CONCLUSIONS

It would be short sighted to suggest that based on the process evaluation of this specific campaign, drug awareness mass media campaigns should not be resourced in future. Drug issues are complex and ever changing and interventions must reflect this and be founded on evidence based best practice.

SOURCE

A Process Evaluation of the National Drug Awareness Campaign, 2003-2005.
Dublin: National Advisory Committee on Drugs. 2008, 1-98.
Full report available at http://www.nacd.ie/publications/prevention_nacdevaluation.html

FUNDING

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REFERENCES

Available on request.