

Survivor Story-Telling in Road Trauma Education and Support Programs: Reviewing the Evidence

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Abstract

Survivor story-telling is used in many road trauma education and support programs, yet the impact on both the narrator and their audiences is not well understood. A scoping review of the published literature was undertaken to determine the range of survivor story-telling approaches currently used, identified risks and benefits, and any mitigation strategies to support the well-being of the survivor story-teller and program participants. This paper presents the review findings, and implications given the major gap that exists in the evidence-base relating to the practice of involving and supporting road trauma survivors presenting direct testimony in prevention and post-vention programs.

Background

Many organisations, such as the Road Trauma Support Services Victoria, engage survivors as speakers (volunteer or paid) in their support and education programs. This practice is evident internationally in various health, mental health and trauma recovery or safety programs. This participation is seen as contributing to survivors' own recovery and healing processes, motivated by a wish to prevent a recurrence of traumatic events or influence the community in other ways in relation to their trauma experience as well as promoting road safety behaviours in audiences. This study sought to identify the current evidence for and impacts of this use of survivor engagement (volunteer or paid) in road trauma story-telling activities.

Method

Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) six stage scoping review method was adopted. The research question was: *What evidence exists in relation to the experiences of road trauma survivor storytelling and/or listening?* Subsidiary questions were: (1) What is the range of approaches to the use of road trauma survivor storytelling and listening; (2) What are the identified benefits, risks and ethical issues associated with these approaches; and (3) What are any identified mitigation strategies, including screening, selecting, training and supporting volunteers. Based on the search terms in multiple combinations and selected databases, 564 articles published between January 2010 and June 2016 were initially retrieved, with 31 articles identified as potentially relevant to the study. Study selection focused on articles that were peer-reviewed, specifically road trauma related and referred to the use of direct testimony or survivor story-telling in some form of intervention. Two researchers (LH and MA) independently examined the article titles and abstracts for possible inclusion and a further 21 articles were excluded.

Results

Ten publications met the inclusion criteria (Buckmaster et al., 2015; Cuenen et al., 2016; Elliott, 2011; Feenstra et al., 2014; Fylan & Stradling, 2014; Guttman, 2015; Poulter & McKenna, 2010; Ricketts et al., 2010; Tuong et al., 2014; Twisk et al., 2014). Seven were empirical studies and three were theoretical contributions. Six of the seven empirical studies established small to moderate support for the use of survivor accounts in some form in the evaluated programs. None of these programs was targeted towards road traffic offenders. No evidence was found in any of the seven studies for any negative emotional impacts on survivors or participants. However, two studies identified some negative attitudinal changes towards road safety. Only three studies referred specifically to the use of face-to-face survivor stories in programs, and only very briefly described training and support needs for these story-tellers.

Conclusions

Since 2010, very few studies can be identified that evaluate the use of survivor story-telling in road trauma programs, particularly those oriented to offender groups. However, the majority of studies that were identified provide support for the practice. A major gap exists in the evidence-base relating to the practice of involving and supporting road trauma survivors giving direct testimony in prevention and post-vention programs, and the impact on their audiences.

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