Work-related injuries and mass media

- 640,700 workers experience a work-related injury/illness in Australia each year
- 375 killed as a result of work-related injuries in Australia each year

- Mass media campaigns
  - potentially alter knowledge or attitudes of large proportion of population
  - provide support for behaviour change
Study aims

• Improve evidence base for conducting effective WHS mass media campaigns

• Summarise the current state of knowledge regarding best practice for WHS mass media campaigns

Method

• Industry review
  – Interviews with WHS communications managers in Australia (SA, NSW, Vic, Tas), Canada, UK, New Zealand
    • Role of mass media in promoting WHS
    • Description of recent campaigns
    • Perceptions of what works and what doesn’t work in campaigns

• Literature review
  – Australian & international public health literature (2001-2010)
    • New issues regarding campaign development (e.g. message content, appeal & delivery)
    • Efficacy of threat appeals & alternatives
    • Evaluations of WHS mass media campaigns
Results – Industry review

- Realistic expectations for mass media. Used for agenda setting & raising awareness of broad WHS issues, minor role in changing behaviour.

- Tactical/targeted activities preferred for communicating specific messages for specific groups/industries.

- Decision to use mass media dependent on type of message, size of target audience, resources available.

Work Safe (Vic) - “Homecomings”
Literature review - Campaign development

- Use a psychological theory as a conceptual base for the campaign (e.g. Transtheoretical Model of Change).

- Clearly define campaign objectives, select appropriate variables to measure if objectives achieved.

- Identify target audience then tailor message and communication channels to their motivations and preferences.

- Combine different forms of media to reach target audience.

Campaign development...

- Integrate mass media with other activities (e.g. education, enforcement, community engagement).

- Messages need to make explicit behavioural recommendations relating to work context.

- Provide sufficient resources to reach target audience and sustain appropriate exposure to campaign.
Mass media campaigns for back pain

- “Back pain. Don’t take it lying down” (Victoria). US$7.6m 3yrs. (TV, radio, outdoor, info to GP’s) 15% decline in back pain claims, beliefs more positive - sustained 4yrs after.
  - Scotland (radio, info for health prof, no work message) Change in attitudes only.
  - Norway (small scale, local) Small change in beliefs only.
  - Canada (radio, no work messages) Small change in beliefs only.

Threat appeals

- Research on effectiveness of threat appeals is inconclusive

- Specific conditions for fear appeal to have an impact:
  1. Describe a threat (severity & susceptibility)
  2. Suggest a safe behaviour to cope with threat (perceived effective, easy to perform)
  3. Increase confidence in target audience ability to successfully perform the safe behaviour
Threat appeals

- Threat reduction
  E.g. Health & Safety Executive UK, “Shattered Lives”

Threat appeals

- May be counterproductive if believe unable to protect selves from threat, resulting in defensive responses (e.g. avoidance, denial, reactance)

- Impact least on those most in need of changing behaviour (e.g. young males)

- Recommendation: Consider other appeals
Alternatives – Humour

• Positive emotional appeals (e.g. humour) may also need to include messages that provide effective and useful coping strategies.

• E.g. Anti-smoking campaign, UK (mid 1990’s) - John Cleese

“Let me show you how much ash a 20 a day smoker makes – of course, not all are cremated”

University of Adelaide

Humour – Road safety

“Pinkle”, RTA, NSW

“Blazed”, NZ Transport Agency

“Don’t Drive Like A W”, MAC, SA

“Matemorphosis”, MAC, SA
Humour – Rail safety

• “Dumb ways to die”, Metro Trains, Victoria (Nov 2012)

Evaluations of WHS campaigns

• Few evaluations (n=10)
  – variation in quality
  – effectiveness measured by changes in awareness, attitudes, behavioural intentions – few used objective behaviour
  – most integrated mass media with other activities

• Evaluations should be based on before & after comparisons of work-related variables that are objectively observed & closely linked to workplace safety.
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