Media Campaigns & Crime Prevention:
A Review of the Literature

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Introduction

This paper provides a brief review of research on the effectiveness of media campaigns in the prevention of crime. Media campaigns have been widely used in the Greater Rochester community. For over ten years Project Exile has used media campaigns to provide public information on the possible consequences of possessing and using illegal guns especially by persons with prior felony convictions. Project Safe Neighborhoods in Rochester and around the country also used public service announcements (PSAs) to discourage gun crime. Underlying focus group research showed that imprisoned offenders were most concerned about the impact of their incarceration on their families. That became the focus of the PSAs.

Expectations of the impact of crime prevention campaigns have often drawn on what have been regarded as successful campaigns in such areas as smoking cessation and prevention, and campaigns against drinking and driving. Unlike the anti-crime campaigns, these campaign and more general advertising has been intended to reach a wide audience and to prevent more casual behavior. The campaigns, however, do generally share the goal of deterrence.

Deterrence Theory

Deterrence theory is the central theory upon which a vast majority of preventative measures and practices are based. The theory holds that human beings are rational actors that seriously consider the net gains and losses of any action before engaging in said action, and thus by altering the perception of gains and losses it is possible to dissuade individuals from engaging in unwanted actions or behaviors. Deterrence theory aims to alter the perception of risk and loss of certain activities by altering the individual's perceptions of three elements: severity of punishment, certainty of punishment and celerity of punishment.

The implementation of deterrence theory can be divided into two core categories, general and specific deterrence, based on the target audience. General deterrence targets the population as a whole, aiming to change society's perceptions about the severity, certainty and celerity of punishment. Rather than focusing on society as a whole, specific deterrence focuses instead upon

individual offenders, aiming to deter future crime. Given their nature, most media campaigns fit into the category of general deterrence, often targeting the general population or at-risk populations.

An Overview of Crime Prevention and Media Campaigns

To understand some of the problems surrounding the study of the use of media in crime prevention, it is important that we are clear in what we consider to be a media campaign aimed at crime prevention. Barthe's 2006 study provides an excellent definition for *Prevention Publicity*, defining it as "(1) A planned effort (2) by an agency (3) to promote crime prevention practices (4) by creating distinct campaigns designed (5) to educate victims or deter offenders." Barthe goes on to say that this publicity passes relevant information onto the public, as well as potential victims and offenders; this publicity serves to inform and educate communities about a problem, introduce methods of target-hardening, or to warn of an increased police presence, with the aim of decreasing the opportunities for a crime to occur (2006).

While Barthe's definition of prevention publicity is fairly straightforward and clearly states the desired results for such campaigns (the education of victims and deterring of offenders), it is somewhat nebulous as to how such results are obtained. Lab, in his 2004 study of crime prevention programs, points out that most programs and organizations lack definite or easily identifiable goals. Often times they are the brainchildren of politicians, who often seek to use such programs to show that they are tough on crime or that they have been effective in reducing crime (Lab, 2004).This may lead to one of the major problems with the research surrounding prevention publicity: that without definite or clearly defined goals, most programs are evaluated on measures that do not pertain to their objectives (Lab, 2004; O'Keefe, 1985; Poyner, 1989). Perhaps as a result, Atkin and Decker point out that there exists only a limited understanding of the effects of prevention publicity, despite their now widespread use (as cited in Lab, 2004, p.).

With a definition of prevention publicity and an acknowledgement of the some key issues in evaluating such campaigns, the next question that must be answered is in what cases have these campaigns been used effectively? While there is conflicting ideas on when deterrence

works, there is a general agreement as to when it does not work. As previously stated, deterrence holds that offenders are rational actors who weigh potential gains and losses prior to acting. Thus, deterrent measures will work on crimes which involve some planning and forethought, but will likely have no effect on crimes of passion, which often involve little planning or forethought. It is generally agreed upon that property crimes and robbery are more susceptible to deterrence as compared to heat of the moment crimes, such as homicide and assault (Bailey, 1998; Bowers & Johnson, 2003; Kane, 2006). It also seems that prevention publicity campaigns may be better at affecting and changing attitudes than behaviors (Flexon & Guerette, 2009; O'Keefe, 1985; Riley & Mayhew, 1980), although there is some support that such campaigns can change the behaviors of the target audience (Beedle, 1984; Bowers & Johnson, 2003; Kane, 2006).

In short, prevention publicity is the planned usage of campaigns to prevent crimes, often by encouraging crime prevention practices in the target audience. Such programs may be plagued by unclear goals and by their very nature are difficult to evaluate in a quantifiable manner. The volumes of literature surrounding such programs offer mixed support, although there are a few general points upon which the majority of the literature agrees.

Effective Programs

What makes an effective preventative media campaign? Based upon the points previously discussed, an effective campaign must have, at the very least: a clear goal and mission statement, a means by which to evaluate and measure its effectiveness, and it should target crimes which are susceptible to deterrence. There are several questions that an organization or agency should focus on answering prior to undertaking any campaign:

- Who or what organization or agency will be in charge?
- What are the goals of the campaign? How will the campaign be evaluated? How will success or failure be measured?
- Who is the target audience? Does the campaign target offenders, victims or both groups?
- Where, when and how will information be disseminated to the target audience?

Determining who will be in charge of the campaign is an important decision that should be made early on. Those involved in the campaign must create a structured and clear hierarchy, deciding on a form of leadership, who will be involved in planning and decision making, and who will have the final say in decisions. While those in political offices and positions can be extremely helpful in getting the ball rolling, Lab's study suggests that groups and campaigns shouldn't rely solely on such figures, and that campaigns that do often fall apart when this central figure leaves office (2004). Peter Goris' study on community crime prevention suggests that a core group of numerous groups and agencies involved in the community in question will bring numerous objectives, agendas and goals to the table,

> "Each agency puts forward its own analysis and solution towards a certain phenomenon… these differences can be complementary to each other as well as contradictory… Moreover, the empirical data also confirm that these differences are not scattered throughout the several agencies. Rather than cluster these differences; police agencies on the one hand and welfare agencies on the other hand." (2001)

Goris argues that this conflict model approach may be the best for balancing the goals, agendas and ideas of the campaign, helping it to focus on strengthening communities and making them stronger (2001). Creating a clear and strong organizational hierarchy should be considered the central foundation of an effective campaign, and by placing an emphasis on co-operation between governmental bodies, local agencies and the public such programs may be made sustainable and better focused than campaigns ran by a single agency or group (Goris, 2001; Kelly, Caputo & Jamieson, 2005) .

Determining and creating a clear mission statement and goal is another problem that any campaign must address in order to be effective. Many campaigns and organizations involved with such campaigns often lack a clear goal or mission statement, and suffer an inability to measure the effectiveness of their efforts in a meaningful and quantifiable manner (Farrington, 1997; Lab, 2004; Poyner, 1989). Poorly planned or poorly executed campaigns may, in addition to wasting valuable resources, serve to increase the fear of crime, harm police and community relations, among other unintended consequences (Barthe, 2006). An organization or campaign's

goals and mission statements should be short and to the point, but also phrased in a positive manner, and should be easily understood by the general public (Barthe, 2006; Farrington, 1997; O'Keefe, 1985). Determining the goals of a campaign will also help in the determination of how to measure the effectiveness of the campaign, and if it was a success or failure.

Evaluating prevention publicity campaigns can be difficult, as they do not lend themselves to randomized experimental models (Farrington, 1997). The cheapest method of evaluation for such programs is to simply look at recorded crime rates before and after the implementation of the campaign, although this means of evaluation exposes the program to many threats of internal validity (Farrington, 1997). The best method of evaluation, Farrington argues, would be to look for a comparable sister-community in the same area as the experimental community, with risk factors and outcomes, such as crime, delinquency, substance abuse, adolescent misbehavior, etc., being measured in both communities prior to, during and after implementation of the program (1997).

Determining both the target audience and the means of getting information to them is another consideration that must be taken into account. As previously stated, most media-based crime prevention campaigns fall under the category of general deterrence, targeting the general population rather than specific offenders. That being said, the general population can be further divided into two possible audiences: potential victims and potential offenders. While there will be an overlap in which groups are reached, it should be decided early on if a campaign will target a single audience or both (Barthe, 2006). Some studies have suggested that targeting potential victims may be more effective than targeting potential offenders, as potential victims are more susceptible to positive alterations in their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors (Flexon & Guerette, 2009; Riley & Mayhew, 1980), although there is some evidence to suggest that potential offenders may be reached and their behaviors altered, especially when given news of a change in policy regarding related crimes or a crackdown on certain offenses (Riley & Mayhew, 1980; Kane, 2006). Such positive changes may lead to increased awareness of criminal activity, as well as increased trust in law enforcement officials along, increased reporting of crimes and suspicious behaviors, and increased participation in crime prevention groups and organizations (O'Keefe, 1985; Riley & Mayhew, 1980).

As with the target audience, it is important that the method of disseminating information be considered as well. Barry Poyner's 1989 meta-analysis of 122 crime prevention campaigns and the studies surrounding them examined what methods of information distribution seemed to be the most effective. Breaking crime prevention campaigns into six general categories (Campaigns and publicity, Policing and other surveillance, Environmental design or improvement, Social and community services, Security devices, and Target removal or modification), Poyner found that numerous methods looked promising in the prevention and reduction of crime. Publicity for crime prevention projects and the use of doorstep campaigns by the police were the two highest scoring methods, with several other methods, such as focused policing, employment of concierges in apartment blocks and the use of design changes to improve surveillance also scoring well (Poyner, 1989). Of the campaigns and publicity methods, doorstep campaigns were the most effective, followed by publicity for the project, signs and posters, property marking and security surveys, police talks in schools, and advertising the usage of security devices (Poyner, 1989). Other studies have also pointed to public safety announcements (PSAs) and brochures as effective means of disseminating information and promoting positive behaviors (O'Keefe, 1985; Beedle, 1984), and that exposure to multiple types of media increased the likelihood of positive change (Riley & Mayhew, 1980).

In summary, an organization or agency that wishes to run an effective campaign must create a clear and structured hierarchy, especially if the campaign is a multi-agency campaign. The campaign must have a clear and concise mission statement that the general public should be able to understand, appreciate and rally behind. Alongside definite goals, there should be a definite means of evaluating the success or failure of the program, one that preferably looks beyond the changes in crime rates in the community or area targeted. A target audience should be determined, along with a method of reaching said audience. While some studies suggest that targeting potential victims is more effective than targeting potential offenders, it is possible to target and reach both groups. Finally, a method by which to disseminate information should be chosen, although evidence shows that exposure to multiple methods of dissemination is more likely to result in positive changes (For Poyner's table of effective methods, see Appendix A).

Conclusion

While the use of media campaigns in crime prevention is relatively new, many of the same issues and arguments that have plagued deterrence theory have proven troublesome for the quantitative evaluation of media-based crime prevention campaigns. The literature surrounding such campaigns is divided and provides a mixed support for such campaigns, although there are some key elements that the literature agrees upon. Firstly, one of the major failings in the majority of such campaigns is a lack of formal organization and goals. Without clear and definite goals, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness and success of any such campaign, and results are often based simply on any changes in the number of arrests for related crimes in the area.

While the literature behind prevention publicity campaigns offers mixed support, those that support prevention publicity campaigns make it clear that effective campaigns must have a clear and concise mission statement that the general public should be able to understand, appreciate and rally behind, a clear means of evaluating the effectiveness and the success or failure of the program. Effective campaigns must also have a clear target audience, along with a method of reaching said audience. Evidence also suggests that exposure to multiple forms of media and publicity increase the likelihood that campaigns will be effective, with an effective campaign implementing and exposing its target audience to multiple methods of information dissemination.

Appendix A Poyner's Table of Overall Effectiveness of Crime Prevention Measures

Table 2: Overall Effectiveness of Measures

Group and type of preventive measure	+2	+1	+0	-1	Av.
A. CAMPAIGNS AND PUBLICITY (74 citings)	37	24	11	2	1.30
A1 Advertising/publicity to encourage the use of security devices	4	5	7	1	.71
A2 Property marking	8	5	3	0	1.31
A3 Publicity for the project	9	4	0	0	1.69
A4 Security surveys	5	7	1	0	1.31
A5 Doorstep campaigns by the police	7	2	0	0	1.78
A6 Police talk in schools	2	0	0	1	1.00
A7 Anti-shoplifting signs and posters	2	1	0	0	1.67
B. POLICING AND OTHER SURVEILLANCE (68 citings)	36	20	10	2	1.32
B1 Neighborhood or block watch	5	10	3	0	1.11
B2 Increased police patrols	6	4	4	1	1.00
B3 Focused or saturation policing	10	2	1	0	1.69
B4 CCTV surveillance	7	0	1	1	1.44
B5 Citizen and vigilante patrols	1	3	1	0	1.00
B6 Concierges	3	1	0	0	1.75
B7 Increased staffing of facilities	2	0	0	0	2.00
B8 Security guards for housing blocks	1	0	0	0	2.00
B9 Extra ticket inspection staff	1	0	0	0	2.00
C. ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN/IMPROVEMENT (45 citings)	24	12	9	0	1.33
C1 Lighting	6	4	1	0	1.45
C2 Fencing	4	1	2	0	1.29
C3 Design changes to improve surveillance by staff	4	1	0	0	1.80
C4 Cleanup of neighborhood	3	0	2	0	1.20
C5 Physical improvements to housing (modernization, painting, etc.)	1	1	2	0	.75
C6 Landscaping	1	1	2	0	.75
C7 Security screens for staff	1	1	0	0	1.50
C8 Road closure or street changes	1	1	0	0	1.50
C9 Improved visibility of store interiors	1	1	0	0	1.50
C10 Wider market gangways	1	0	0	0	2.00
C11 Parking meters designed to display last coins	1	0	0	0	2.00
C12 Secure bicycle compound at school	0	1	0	0	1.00
D. SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES (27 citings)	3	4	16	4	.22
D1 Forming a Residents' Association (public-sector housing)	2	1	4	1	.50
D2 Organized recreational activities for young people	0	1	4	0	.20
D3 Providing youth and community centres or play areas	1	1	2	1	.40
D4 Localized housing services (public sector housing)	0	1	2	0	.33
D5 Counseling and social work	0	0	3	0	.00
D6 Education projects	0	0	1	2	-.67

E.	SECURITY DEVICES (26 citings)	14	7	5	0	1.35
E1	Improving domestic door and window locks	5	5	2	0	1.25
E2	Electronic access control	5	0	1	0	1.67
E3	Burglar alarms	0	2	2	0	.50
E4	Car steering-column locks	2	0	0	0	2.00
E5	Increased security of drug cabinets in pharmacies	1	0	0	0	2.00
E6	Chaining of retail goods on display	1	0	0	0	2.00
F.	TARGET REMOVAL OR MODIFICATION (5 citings)	4	1	0	0	1.80
F1	Exact fare systems on buses	2	0	0	0	2.00
F2	Reducing amount of cash in tills	1	1	0	0	1.50
F3	Removing coin-operated gas/electricity meters	1	0	0	0	2.00
X.	OTHER (4 citings)					
X1	ID required for use of personal checks	1	0	0	0	2.00
X2	Publicly identifying the most shoplifted items	1	0	0	0	2.00
X3	Rewarding children for not shoplifting	1	0	0	0	2.00
X4	Escorting senior citizens (OAPs)	0	1	0	0	1.00

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