

REGIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION CONFERENCE

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ENGAGING THE MEDIA TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AND GAIN SUPPORT

Realize the influence of the broadcast media on people's lives and choices

- Sets trends for popular culture and other cultural impacts such as fashion, food, décor, use of language;
- Shapes attitudes, belief systems and relationships;
- Consumerism;
- Insights into other people, places and things.

Recognize successful models of prevention efforts via the broadcast media

PSA campaigns

- Vince and Larry crash dummies, conflict of message (music theme exhaust pipe/suicide);
- McGruff-take a bite out of crime;
- Iron Eyes Cody deemed effective by ad agencies but not effective by researchers;
- Smokey the Bear.

Entertainment Programming

- Archie Bunker- energy conservation;
- Happy Days- Fonz takes out a library card;
- PRISM Awards – Substance abuse prevention and promotion of treatment;
- On screen seatbelt use.

ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF ENGAGING LOCAL MEDIA IN SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

The following information was significantly adapted from Entertainment- Education: A Communication strategy for Social Change by Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1999.

Dilemma #1: The Pro-social Media Development Dilemma

Is it right to use the mass media as a persuasive tool to foster suicide prevention?
Who decides whether a behavior is pro-social and on the effects the local media promotion is likely to have on an audience?
Will promotion of suicide related information promote a consciousness in audiences that is positive or negative (copycat suicide, brink of depression suicide, end of life suicides etc.) behavior?

Dilemma #2: Prosocial Content Dilemma

How do you distinguish between pro-social and antisocial content of media messages?
(Others may perceive information perceived by some as pro-social as antisocial).
Labeling an issue obviously involves a value judgment on the part of the message source (the media outlet), which may be perceived different on the part of the receiver's value judgment. This could include the "not my problem syndrome", "isn't it awful syndrome", "it can't happen here- denial syndrome".

Dilemma #3: The Media Source Centered Dilemma

Who decides about media-education efforts in the local media market? The decision maker is typically the Community Affairs Director however, as in any organization, there is a corporate hierarchy that is not only accessible but also key to decision making. Station owners, Program Directors, News Casters, Producers, and other station/cable carrier executives have the potential to establish the influence necessary to mount a local media campaign on behalf of a community concern.

Dilemma #4: The Audience Segmentation Dilemma

How segmented is the audience? Who comprises the audience? Will a message to one audience alienate another important audience segment?

Dilemma #5: The Oblique Persuasion Dilemma

The route to persuasion through media messages can include sugar coating the lessons, in part to breakdown the audience learning defenses while engaged with television or radio. Audiences might think they are entertained while being educated. Most audiences realize that messages within entertainment media can be educational and entertaining.

Dilemma #6: The Sociocultural Equality Dilemma

How can one insure sociocultural equality by providing equal treatment to various audience segments? Achieving sociocultural equality through local media campaigns is especially important in a diverse community. The media outlet knows its market, so messages and images must be responsive to ethnicity, linguistic background, and gender... campaigns should give an equal play to different voices.

Dilemma #7: The Unintended-Effects Dilemma Or Don't Shoot The Messenger

Development of local media cause oriented activities is an action whose consequences are not always predictable. Undesirable, unintended consequences sometimes result from the diffusion of prosocial messages. Often media outlet alliances with researchers, government agencies and experts can provide the outlet and insurance policy to reinforce the media outlets action as steps taken for community well being. The ethical dilemmas ultimately are decided by the audience, as they choose whether to accept their exposure to the suicide prevention message, however the media outlet is perceived as the messenger.

IDENTIFY STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE LOCAL BROADCAST MEDIA IN ADVANCING SUICIDE PREVENTION

Key audience characteristics: social norms, degree of interconnectedness, values and beliefs, degree of exposure, selective interpretation.

Audience members actively negotiate the meanings they perceive when processing the message. The Archie Bunker example is an oppositional reading of a negative role model doing a positive action. Understanding station demographics is a first step in presenting a case to a station. Enrolling a radio station that is known for playing music that may have a negative connotation to most listeners may be the exact station format for messages to teens that are fans of the station. The message would be opposite of what they are used to listening to...therefore causing attention to the message.

Like wise messages can be crafted especially for radio that are specifically designed to reach the stations demographic...country, talk radio, rap, easy listening, pop, etc. all have their own vernacular that can be exploited for messages.

Organizational Factors: presence of champions, availability of start up capital, consensus and collaboration between stakeholders (media officials, commercial sponsors, policy makers, service organizations, quality of technical expertise in research, production, project management, campaign orchestration, etc.)

Several champions in a community must become interested in a media/suicide prevention communications project and put the weight and influence (leveraging status, power and resources) behind the idea. Start up capital may take considerable time to package however there are cost-effective measures that can be taken with the final product such as entering into Community Service Agreements with stations, bicycling radio spots among stations, creating ancillary product markets such as video stores, libraries, service organizations. The most effective projects (integrated community media approaches) require collaboration between stakeholders. The gathering of resources should focus on finding the communities most prominent and skilled expertise in communications research, message production, and project management and promotion.

Media Environment: degree of media saturation, credibility of source, media access for target audiences, choice of media mix, political and economic influences (potential for commercial business partners).

Keep in mind that the suicide prevention message is going to compete for audience attention with other media messages. The ability to tailor make the communications program to the media outlet and the outlets audience will be unique for each outlet due to the nature of competing television and radio stations (media saturation) within a market.

The perceived credibility of the mass medium transmitting the message influences the effectiveness of the project. The effectiveness of a broadcast message is greater when accompanied by supplementary messages to form an integrated communications campaign involving other forms of media (newspapers, kiosks, billboards, etc.). Getting the political and cost factors in place will directly effect the breadth and depth of the communications campaign.

Infrastructural Factors: A broadcast media campaign must be accompanied by and adequate infrastructure for providing services or it will not have strong effects in changing audience behavior. Services must be prepared for the result of media exposure, properly staffed and available upon demand.