Canada gets its house in order

R Stanwick

Canada’s parliamentarians pass Bill C-260, an amendment to the Hazardous Products Act creating a reduced ignition propensity cigarette

It was not without some sense of historical irony that Liberal Member of Parliament in Canada, The Honourable John McKay, observed, while speaking in favor of a proposed legislative amendment, that in February 1916 much of Parliament burned to the ground. Although no official cause was ever provided, it was widely believed that a cigarette caused this fire.1

Andrew McGuire performs a great service in this issue of capturing the process that has led, after 30 years of struggle, to the introduction of safer cigarettes [see page 264]. The tactics he and his colleagues used are masterly and conjure up an image of a David and Goliath-like struggle to change the tobacco industry’s practises. In addition to admiring and acknowledging the skills displayed by McGuire, I confess to being one of his “thousands of advocates” who have also engaged the tobacco industry on this subject. For a decade, spanning the mid 1980s to mid 1990s, in conjunction with local champions in the fire suppression services, I worked on a number of fronts. Most memorable was the one involving the Product Safety Branch (PSB) of what was Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada. Although this Branch had a new home in Health Canada it continues to be responsible for the Hazardous Products Act. This is the Act that has now been amended to make cigarettes less of a fire hazard. Among one of the more remarkable discussions I had surrounding the obstacles to modifying the ignition properties of cigarettes was the rationale provided by a Branch staffer. The rationale was the same one marshalled by the tobacco industry in opposing Bill C-260 20 years later—their grave, ironic concern that the proposed changes in the construction of cigarettes could be harmful to the health of the consumer! In assessing the merits of Bill C-260, Health Canada indicated it was aware of only two papers addressing the issue, both conducted by the tobacco industry, neither of which supported the concern.2

Instead of zeroing in on cigarettes, 20 years ago Canada’s PSB elected to focus on making furniture often associated with cigarette related fires more resistant to ignition—for example, mattresses and upholstered furniture,3 and took the form of a voluntary standard. However, many pieces of furniture would not be replaced for at least 20 years and when they were near the end of their usefulness, they often found their way into the used furniture market. In all likelihood, the eventual purchasers of these products would be from a segment of the population that would also have a higher rate of smoking and therefore a higher risk of fires. PSB personnel acknowledged that had the initiative tackled cigarettes, the benefits could be realized in a period in a few months—the shelf life of tobacco products.3

McGuire is not alone in exhibiting extraordinary tenacity to this issue. The passage of Bill C-260 in Canada required the same attributes, displayed in abundance by Member of Parliament John McKay. Moving this Bill from conception to passage took more than five years, in part because Mr McKay was obliged to introduce the Bill as a Private Member’s Bill. (In the Canadian system, any Parliamentarian can introduce legislation but rarely are such Bills passed into law.) Mr McKay not only succeeded in securing the passage of Bill C-260 but did so with the support of all parties—another rarity.

Dr Yves Morin, an internationally respected researcher in internal medicine and cardiology, championed the Bill through Canada’s Senate. Dr Morin was able to ensure the legislation did not end up in limbo and it became law in late 2004. The Bill is set to come into effect on 1 October 2005.

Health Canada’s estimates suggest that the annual toll of 53 deaths, 227 injuries (51 fire fighters, 176 civilians), and 28 million dollars in property damage from cigarette caused fires will be significantly influenced by this Bill.2 A note of caution about these benefits: as reflected in the term “reduced ignition propensity cigarette”, the testing standard adopted only requires that no more that 25% of the cigarettes tested burn their full length to fulfill the regulatory obligations. Consequently, there is still the need for safe disposal of the estimated 56 billion cigarettes consumed annually in Canada.4 The promotion of smoke detectors in homes is also critical, especially in the homes of regular smokers or visitors who smoke.

There will be a significant time lag in reporting on the impact of this preventive measure on fire deaths and injuries, partly because the data are routinely generated by often lengthy fire scene investigations. Nevertheless, it behoves the Canadian injury community to monitor this achievement.1

Bill C-260 and its US counterparts are enormous achievements in injury prevention. We have long known how much reducing the damage done by cigarettes can contribute to health promotion.5 Public health approaches these opportunities using a harm reduction framework. In this, physical and social harms associated with risk taking behavior are mitigated by making these behaviors less dangerous.6–10 Efforts to date in dealing with harm reduction for tobacco have largely centered on reducing exposure to second hand smoke through restrictions to smoking in public,11 in the home,12 by substituting smokeless tobacco,12 or by lower nicotine products.13

The accomplishments of Andrew McGuire and others have made available another plank in tobacco harm reduction—the reduced ignition propensity cigarette. In addition, as suggested by McGuire, the public health implications of this accomplishment are broader. It means that tobacco companies can now be held legally liable for knowingly producing a product that is dangerous. In Canada, another possibly equally important development is the potential for the amendment to the Hazardous Product Act to set a precedent that would pave the way for other regulations that could reduce the harmful effects of tobacco products.14


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Communication

Using communication theory in injury prevention campaigns

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Communication research and theory can increase the impact of campaigns in the field of injury prevention

Dozens of communication campaigns have been designed and implemented on local, state, and federal levels for purposes of reducing injury related risks and rates of injuries (including both unintentional injury and intentional injury resulting from violence). However, practitioners rarely turn to communication research and theory in order to design and implement campaigns. Theory driven research and literature from the communication disciplines can provide useful insight into campaign development. After extensive and detailed review of communication research that addressed injury prevention campaigns, we developed guidelines that may improve the results of campaigns that use communication tools for purposes of reducing injury rates in the US.

Communication campaigns are designed for a relatively well defined and large audience, and they typically are limited to a given time period. Campaigns include the organized use of both mass media and interpersonal sources of information to increase awareness and knowledge about injury and safety and to increase rates of safety behaviors. Mass media include television, radio, newspapers, billboards, and the Internet. Interpersonal sources can include face to face meetings, home visits, and workshops. Printed materials, such as brochures and pamphlets, may be considered a mass medium and can also be used in interpersonal contexts.

We summarize here four theoretical perspectives that emerged from a comprehensive literature review conducted of all communication research published from 1992 to 2002: 162 journal articles, book chapters, and books were collected. The literature was examined according to: theory; methodology; audience targeted; scope of intervention—that is, individual message, interpersonal versus media tactics, or full campaign; and any cultural specificity. We conclude here with a set of guidelines developed from the theoretical perspectives and research findings.

COMMUNICATION RESEARCH ON INJURY PREVENTION CAMPAIGNS

The research literature on communication campaigns for injury prevention focused mainly on communitywide and school based efforts. In general, communitywide campaigns are effective at increasing safety practices associated with bicycle helmet use and children’s car seat use, but have had little effect on other safety practices. Usually, campaigns increased knowledge about injury prevention when various channels of information—both mass media and interpersonal—were used. However, knowledge gain did not necessarily correlate with increases in preventive behaviors. Research has found that mass media messages can increase awareness, knowledge, and can change some short term behaviors. 21-24 Interpersonal efforts increased motivation to comply with requested behavior changes more so than media messages. 25-27 Interpersonal communication has included: workshops where experts talk one on one with audience members; community health fairs; and home visits by healthcare professionals to address injury concerns of audiences who are less ambulatory. Other factors, such as use of opinion leaders, level of change requested, and personal relevance of the message to an audience mediated intent to change behavior. 9 These factors derive from theoretical perspectives and are described in more detail below. One group of studies in schools highlighted the importance of considering self identity, race, and socioeconomic status in campaign design: authors found that increased helmet use occurred only for white, female children from high income families. 10, 11

Several studies in communication and injury applied one of four theoretical traditions. The first tradition stems from psychology, and the health belief model is one theoretical model derived from this cognitive tradition. The second tradition, also from psychology, focuses on the use of fear appeals and whether there are certain factors that can make fear appeals in messages more effective for health behavior goals. The extended parallel processing model has been used to test the effects of fear appeals on injury prevention. The third tradition is developed from a sociological perspective, where flow of information and community dimensions play significant roles, and where methodology is more quasi-experimental than formally empirical. Within this tradition, the diffusion of innovations model has informed research on injury prevention communication. Finally, the fourth tradition stems from public relations

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research, where the situational theory of publics has been used. This theory intersects community level effects with individual effects from campaigns.

**Health belief model**

According to the health belief model, preventive behaviors are influenced by five factors: (1) perceived barriers to changing behavior; (2) perceived benefits of new behavior; (3) perceived susceptibility to a risk or injury; (4) perceived severity of the outcome of that risk; and (5) cues to action, which can be internal, such as perceptions and opinions, or external, such as environmental events, media messages, or physician recommendations. Cues to action trigger the other four factors. Communication campaigns are a cue to action and, therefore, have an indirect effect on attitude change and behavioral outcomes. Additionally, the theory explains the importance of self efficacy, the level of confidence an individual has about accomplishing the recommended behaviors. Giving individuals tools for increasing self efficacy—through media messages, interpersonal interactions, and opportunities for trial behavior—will increase intent to perform preventive behaviors. Response efficacy (belief that the behaviors recommended are effective) has also been shown to be important.

The value of the health belief model to injury prevention campaigns has already been supported through numerous studies. Research has shown that messages encouraging small scale changes to prevent injury, such as turning handles of pots to backs of stoves, have been successful in increasing response efficacy, and in turn, behavior changes in audiences. One study that used the health belief model assessed farmers’ attitudes and beliefs about farm equipment accidents. Findings showed that farmers believed farm equipment injuries were severe and serious, that safety measures were effective, and that they were capable of using safety measures. However, they did not believe themselves to be susceptible to serious accidents, and therefore did not personalize the safety messages targeted to them.

**Extended parallel process model**

The extended parallel process model applies the same concepts as the health belief model, but centers on the use of fear appeals and fear arousal. Several factors influence the relation between fear appeal and resulting behavior change. For example, a highly threatening fear appeal will fail without an equally strong efficacy component. Three outcomes are possible by individuals responding to a fear appeal. First, a danger control response can occur when an individual takes action or intends to take action to avert a threat. Second, a fear control response can occur when an individual is too fearful to take action. A third alternative is to ignore the message, which typically occurs if the threat is perceived as irrelevant or insignificant.

The extended parallel processing model may offer a situational dimension to campaign design, where the type of injury may dictate whether a fear appeal should be used. On one hand, promoting fear may backfire because it may increase feelings of helplessness in the face of an injury considered unpredictable and unpreventable. On the other hand, fear may help increase attention of injuries related to violence on college campuses or extreme sports performed by adolescents—as long as messages are coupled with strong efficacy components.

**Diffusion of innovations**

Diffusion of innovations explains how and why new behaviors are adopted into communities. In terms of the behavior, called an “innovation,” the following characteristics enhance the probability of its adoption: (1) its compatibility with sociocultural values, economy, and current technology of the community into which it is introduced; (2) its trialability, where it may be experimented with on a limited basis; (3) relative advantage over previous practices; (4) low complexity; (5) cost efficiency or cost benefits; and (6) observability, or the degree to which the results are visible to others. Audience members can range from innovators—who make the innovation visible to the community and who are often opinion leaders in the community—to laggards, who are the most conservative and suspicious of an innovation and may never adopt.

Campaign planners have applied diffusion of innovations principles by considering the importance of opinion leaders, by using multiple forms of messages for widespread diffusion, and by relying on community and interpersonal communication networks for the basis of diffusion. Strategies such as community involvement and community coalitions are used to share information about safety and practicing safety measures. As many injuries occur in the home and on the streets of local communities, opinion leaders have a large role in instigating prevention efforts. Opinion leaders are people who are influential in guiding norms and opinions within communities. One study reported on the impact of a three year Child Pedestrian Injury Prevention Project. This project comprised pedestrian safety lessons in schools, home activities, and establishment of a committee of citizens who advocated for changes to speed limits near schools, traffic calming, and a programme to map and mark footprints to show children safer pedestrian routes. Significant differences were found over the three year period for pedestrian safety behaviors, such as crossing the road and playing on or near the road.

**Situational theory of publics**

According to the situational theory, three factors predict information seeking, attitude change, and behavior change. The first factor is level of involvement, a measure of how personally relevant a problem can be for an individual. Also defined as perceived emotional connection, involvement increases the likelihood of individuals attending to and comprehending messages. The second factor is problem recognition, which is the extent to which individuals recognize a problem facing them; people do not stop to think about situations unless they perceive that something needs to be done to improve the situation. Constraint recognition is the third factor and is the extent to which individuals see their behaviors as limited by factors beyond their own control. For a campaign to move people to develop organized cognitions and perhaps change behavior, it must show them how to remove constraints to their personally doing anything about a problem. A couple of studies have applied the situational theory of publics to injury prevention efforts regarding drunk driving. These studies identified the need to differentiate publics according to level of involvement and constraint recognition. This would then be used to design different campaign messages for different publics.

**GUIDELINES FOR INJURY PREVENTION CAMPAIGNS**

The following guidelines were developed out of the communication research literature summarized above and the four theoretical perspectives that have informed the research in communication and injury prevention.

- **Multicomponent, multichannel campaigns.** Campaigns that incorporate interpersonal, mass media, and printed sources of information will be more effective than campaigns that put all resources into one channel. Mass media channels can help increase knowledge and awareness,
while interpersonal contact is more effective at motivating trial behavior and safety actions. For example, campaign channels could include printed brochures and billboards, news coverage of special events, public service advertisements, workshops in the community with experts, home visits, and booths at local shopping areas staffed by informed volunteers.

- A mix of voices to spread campaign messages. Messages should be spread through use of both authority figures and peers as spokespeople. The combination increases the likelihood of attention, credibility, and support for campaign goals.

- Simple steps to injury prevention. Messages focusing on simple, minor, or easy prevention techniques, such as turning pot handles to the back of the stove, are more successful than those focusing on complex prevention tactics, such as installing railings in a home or rewiring faulty electrical outlets.

- Encouraging the confidence to make change. Messages need to increase perceptions of susceptibility and severity of risk, but they also need to increase self efficacy. Audience members need to believe they have the capability of performing a requested action; this will reduce their perceptions that injuries are unpredictable and unpreventable. People who look similar to audience members could be used in messages to perform a preventive action and then get rewarded. Messages could include instructions or simple steps to encourage confidence.

- Benefits emphasized over risks. The benefits or rewards for being safe need to be clearly outlined in campaign messages and need to take precedence over risk or fear arousing messages. This addresses the need for response efficacy, which has been shown to increase audience confidence about the adequacy of a prevention tactics.

- Success of fear appeals is dependent on amount of efficacy information. Fear appeals or highly threatening messages will not be effective if they are presented alone. They must be paired with messages that increase self-efficacy, response efficacy, and perceived personalization or relevance.

- Addressing and reducing constraints/barriers to action. Messages need to address constraints and need to also be sensitive to the distinction between perceived and actual constraints. Perceived constraints, such as low self-efficacy, can be addressed through messages. Some, but not all, physical and economic constraints may be addressed as well, for example, by providing resources, free materials, or transportation to workshops. However, reducing barriers such as socioeconomic constraints and literacy levels may be beyond a campaign’s ability.

- Opinion leaders as gatekeepers to attitude and behavior change. Opinion leaders can increase the likelihood of a community accepting a campaign. These individuals should be invited to help plan, develop, and implement the campaign. Including them will gain commitment from communities and will increase audience attention and intent to change behavior. Opinion leaders integrated into campaign development will also help with understanding peer/social norms, which could feasibly be barriers to individual behavior change.

- Consideration of mediating factors in message design. Sex, age, ethnicity, race, education, and income all mediate the level of effect from campaign messages. If audiences do not perceive themselves at risk for an injury, or if they perceive an injury to have few repercussions on their everyday life (low personal involvement), they are less likely to pay attention to messages or attempt to engage in safety behaviors.

CONCLUSION

Communication research can improve injury prevention campaigns, and we offer here guidelines for campaign development that derived from communication theory. However, these guidelines may actually create more questions than answers. Admittedly, the guidelines are not exhaustive, and they derive from a literature review rather than from empirical testing. Future research should not only work at testing the empirical validity of them but also at expanding and elaborating them for purposes of producing more effective injury prevention campaigns. For example, using methodology such as the Delphi process and other focused group discussions might develop more detailed guidelines. Other factors in campaign messages or campaign tactics could be added to the theoretical models. For example, the role of media advocacy in reducing injury rates has not been adequately addressed. In addition, the research here focused on communication only, leaving out the value or impact of engineering and enforcement, two relevant factors in increasing individual behavior change. The influence of communication on enforcement and engineering, and the relation between these three factors, should be studied as well. The guidelines proposed here begin to address necessary distinctions for developing injury prevention campaigns, and we hope they also spark greater scholarly and practical attention towards the value of communication theory and research for the injury field.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to acknowledge Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide for resources that helped with the research and writing of this article.


doi: 10.1136/ip.2004.007104

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Accepted 5 July 2005

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