

DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF CAMPAIGNS TO REDUCE RIP CURRENT-RELATED BEACH DROWNING IN AUSTRALIA

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Background Rip currents are involved in a high proportion of beach drowning and rescue incidents. The most common type of rips in Australia is a fixed rip that appears as a darker, calmer area between regions of breaking waves. People who swim in unpatrolled areas may be endangered by a lack of knowledge about rips – for example choosing to swim in a rip because it looked calm and safe.

Aims This research aimed to develop and evaluate the ‘Don’t get sucked in by the rip’ campaign to improve beachgoer knowledge and recognition of calm-looking rip currents, and to reduce intentions to swim in such rips.

Methods In Study 1, beachgoers were interviewed in an intervention and a control area 1 year before, immediately after, and approximately 6 months after, print-based campaign materials were distributed in the intervention area. Study 2 compared i-pad presentations featuring photographs versus videos of calm-looking rips, using pre- and post-surveys with beachgoers.

Results/Outcome Study 1 demonstrated reasonable penetration and resulted in improved knowledge and behaviours related to rip currents. These improvements were maintained at follow-up. Study 2 indicates whether video-based campaigns improve on the impacts of picture-based campaigns.

Significance It appears to be common that people drown when they choose to swim in rips inadvertently because the rip looks calm and a safe place to swim. Such drowning might be avoided by relatively simple campaigns designed to improve knowledge and recognition of commonly occurring fixed rip currents.