

ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA IN COMBATING DRUG-RELATED CRIME

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Abstract. The **purpose** of the paper is to examine role of the mass media in combating drug addiction and drug-related crime, together with the opportunities of cooperation between the police and the mass media in combating drug-related crime and main problems arising from such cooperation. **Results** of the study allowed us to draw several conclusions. Firstly, we underscore that there is a significant increase in drug consumption, especially among minors and youths. Under these circumstances, prevention-oriented approach to combating drug related crime gains special significance. Secondly, role of the mass media in shaping public perceptions of certain issues, including drugs, makes them a necessary partner for the law enforcement agencies in deterring spread of drug consumption. Thirdly, there are significant problems arising from the fundamentally different interests of the mass media and the police, which require the latter to seek ways to align their activities. Still, we see cooperation as the only way to succeed, as administrative measures, such as censorship, will be largely counterproductive in the age of high availability of the information. **Practical implications** of the study lie in the recommendations for the activities of the police aimed at ensuring efficient cooperation with the mass media in organizing informational campaigns, promoting healthy lifestyle and discouraging drug consumption. We stress upon necessity of the well-planned campaign, including not only careful preparation of the information, but also selection of the most efficient channels of dissemination and setting up of the feedback in order to objectively appraise their results and to allow a certain level of flexibility in adapting and adjusting these campaigns to the circumstances. We also underscore importance of careful selection of the partners in the mass media, so that both sides

of the partnership have a deep understanding of the issue they are working with. Lastly, we investigate features of the information campaigns on the local level. **Value/originality.** The paper provides practical advices for setting up an informational campaign aimed at promoting healthy lifestyle and discouraging drug usage. Additionally, it provides basis for the further research of the issues of police-mass media cooperation, in counteracting drug-related crimes in particular and in prevention of antisocial and criminal behaviour in general.

Keywords: police, mass media, information campaigns, drug-related crime, drug consumption

1. Introduction

Practice indicates that cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the mass media in most cases provides positive results.

Under contemporary conditions associated with deterioration of crime situation in society cooperation between the police, other law enforcement agencies and the mass media requires urgent intensification. At the same time such activity requires concentrating efforts on the particularly acute problems using the most effective forms and methods of cooperation.

Without doubt, combating illegal drug consumption and trafficking in drugs and psychotropic substances must become one of essential areas of cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the mass media. This derives primary from the state and governmental policy documents: the Strategy of State Policy on Drugs for the Period up to 2020 and annual plans of their realization [Strategy of State Policy on Drugs for the Period up to 2020, 2015]. Mentioned above and other principle acts provide wide-ranging measures for protecting society from hazards caused by drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking.

In view of a strictly professional aspect the requirement of intensification of cooperation with the mass media intimately derives from provision of a number of laws of Ukraine: “On State Support of the Mass Media and Social Protection of Journalists”, “On Access to Public Information”, “On Printed Mass Media (Press) in Ukraine”, “On Informational Agencies”, “On Information”, “On National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting”, “On the Policy on Highlighting the Activity of Public Agencies and Local Self-government Bodies of Ukraine in the Mass Media”, “On Television and Radio Broadcasting”, “On Telecommunication” etc. For instance, the law of Ukraine “On the National Police” [On the National Police, 2015] explicitly provides that public opinion is the main criterion for assessing efficiency of police performance. In that regard the law establishes the following main tasks: efficiency of the activity of information and public relation units; outstripping in providing truthful and objective information on police performance; establishing efficient forms of cooperation with all types of the mass media.

Cited directives have been adopted by the authorities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Police on the ongoing basis.

As emphasized above building an effective and transparent cooperation between central and local anti-drug trafficking units of the police and the mass media is of paramount importance, since without taking urgent and efficient measures in this area the situation may completely spin out of control and result in endangering physical and moral public health and lead to degradation of society.

Although separate aspects of combating drug-related crime have been well covered in the works of domestic and foreign researchers, the role of the mass media in this activity had not been adequately reflected.

Therefore, ascertaining the role of the mass media in combating drug-related crime from one side and defining modes of cooperation of law enforcement agencies, other public authorities with the mass media from the other obtain an ever-increasing **relevance**.

The **purpose** of the paper is to examine role of the mass media in combating drug addiction and drug-related crime, together with the opportunities of cooperation between the police and the mass media in combating drug-related crimes and main problems arising from such cooperation.

The paper emphasizes the most hazardous problems of contemporary drug trafficking situation in Ukraine, information on the foreign approaches to cooperation of the police units and the mass media, separate practical results of such cooperation, as well as analysis of spirits among mass media workers and especially domestic journalists and, finally, provides recommendations for ensuring efficient cooperation between the police and the mass media.

2. Characteristic of drug trafficking situation in Ukraine.

Conducted field research and interviews of officers of anti-drug trafficking units clearly identified the tendency of blurring of the differences between dimensions of drug-related crime in cities and rural areas, as well as among different regions of Ukraine. Drug traffickers use one very profitable method on the whole territory of Ukraine – recruiting for drug trafficking (mainly selling drugs) representatives of the most vulnerable sectors of the population living in poverty, namely retired persons, unemployed, women, juveniles, and even children.

Such massive involvement of minor co-perpetrators to illicit drug trafficking have actually led to legalizing illicit drug trafficking sites, which encompass places of residence, education, youth entertainment, and areas of large civilian concentrations.

In our research we have identified one more peculiarity – in the desire to gain profit underclass drug traffickers act compulsively, aggressively and practically forcibly induce children, minors and youths to purchase illegal substances. Such tendencies result in actual wide-

range involvement of population, especially youth, in compulsive drug consumption.

It should be noted, that the lower age limit of drug addiction decreased to 8-12 years. At the same time we observe increasing feminization of drug addiction, ever-growing involving girls and women to drug consumption. Not coincidentally, this problem is viewed as one of the genuine threats to the national security of the state [Ukhal, Sheremet, 2001].

Apparently, all possible measures including emulating foreign positive experience should be taken.

Moreover, the focus should be placed upon preventive, prophylactic measures, on actions that must obstruct the origin of expansion of negative phenomena and subsequently contribute to their minimization.

Obviously, the most efficient in this situation would be building close cooperation between the police and other law enforcement agencies from one side and the mass media from the other.

3. Pros and cons of using the mass media in combating drug-related crime.

Not coincidentally, wide-range involvement of the mass media in combating crime, including illicit drug trafficking, is emphasized by experts of virtually all countries of the world and of the most authoritative international organizations, including the United Nations [Prokhorova, 2002, p. 9]. Furthermore, foreign experts indicate that at the present moment system of criminal justice may play only a limited role in crime prevention, and therefore recognize priority role of the mass media, firstly their educative potential in crime prevention. They explicitly emphasize that the role of the mass media is really essential for awareness-raising in combating drug-related crime [Nehodchenko, 2003].

At the same time issues of long-term impact of the mass media in such general questions as establishing standards of conduct, changing consumption preferences etc. are widely debated. Some academics suggest that most people acknowledge such notions as deviations from standard patterns of conduct and control primary from television programmes. Other researchers claim that journalists play a pivotal role in forming a perception of such notions as order, stability, and changes and also influence the practice of self-control formed according to such perceptions [Buhera, 2006].

Nowadays practically all recognize the leading role of the mass media in introducing the most significant factors to general public, including the problem of legal and illegal drug consumption.

The issue is how the mass media influence public opinion in the drug debate. We are certain, that if all mass media would condemn drug addiction that might provoke an opposite counterproductive effect in society. That is why it is important to tell all the truth about drugs,

including conflicting information. Otherwise public will observe contradictions between real life and information transmitted through the mass media. We witness almost total inflexibility of official authorities that force journalists pursue unilateral informational policy that, in our view, practically restrict freedom of thoughts. Moreover, public authorities have prohibited a number of editions and video films concerning drug addiction, popular song dealing with this issue etc. So, where should be drawn the threshold between on forewarning information and propaganda? We believe that there shouldn't be any restrictions under the declared principle of freedom of information. The same situation has previously happened with drug issue, when domestic mass media under the pretext of protecting the right to freedom of information and democratic expression spoke out against reinforcing overall anti-drug measures and participation of the press in such activity.

Nowadays individual is not required any special skills to obtain information on drugs. Mass media play a pivotal role among sources of the most accessible information on drug nomenclature, their procurement, manufacture, and consumption. Obviously, the leading role takes Internet, followed by such communicative channels as television, radio broadcasting, video products, and the press.

Youths and students acquire information on narcotic substances from Internet WEB-cites, some of them from computer games. In public places, educational institutions, on discotheques young people exchange addresses of informational resources, that is share information.

Obviously, any administrative restriction on the channels described above is not technically possible due to their multiplicity and variability from one side and due to the lack of resources available for organizing such preventive measures from the other. This means that engaging any kind of governmental "censorship" mentioned above is contrived and, as stated before, is used clearly for malicious purposes.

4. Recommendations for setting up awareness-raising anti-drug campaign.

The mass media taking into account their vast daily audience may contribute substantially to combating drug-related crime and preventing drug addiction.

While establishing operational contacts with workers of television, radio, newspapers, magazines, Internet editions and providing them with necessary information on drug trafficking situation, it is essentially to make sure that objectivity and not sensationalism will constitute the basis of the statement. It is highly probable, that aspiration for sensation, readiness to challenge society and the need to improve their rating explain the fact that some television companies, newspapers, Internet portals dissimilate much greater amounts of information supporting amendments to drug legislature or even legalizing some types of drug than information reflecting the consequences of such policy and the related damage.

Taking advantage of the huge potential of the mass media public authorities should take preventive and awareness-raising measures [Media Alphabet, 2015, p. 150-154], aimed at providing objective information to the vast sectors of population on the consequences of drugs consumption and drug abuse, that should contribute to forming a more rational approach to the drug debate and allow to avoid sensationalism.

The tasks of the mass media in this area must be clearly defined:

- ✓ in order to achieve positive results, healthy lifestyle free of drugs must be presented in attractive and positive spirit;
- ✓ benefits of drug-free lifestyle must be emphasized as well as harmful consequences of their consumption;
- ✓ presented information must be objective, exact and credible;
- ✓ related information should be presented in such a way as to allow reinforcing it with other positive arguments in support of healthy lifestyle.

Nevertheless, police officers should take into account that representatives of the mass media specializing on the issue of illicit drug trafficking must have a deep understanding of the issue they are working with. In this regard the police should build partnership relationship with:

- the heads of the printed editions (newspapers, magazines etc.), Internet-media, which contain regular columns dealing with issue of illegal drug manufacture, drug trafficking and drugs addiction;
- journalists and reporter specializing on this topic;
- local public administration and bodies of local self-government putting forward a proposal to release a programme series on the dangers of drug abuse involving educators, psychologists, medical workers etc.;
- public figures, actors, musical and sports activists exercising and promoting healthy lifestyle.

The tactic of engaging possibilities of the mass media constitutes only a part of anti-drug trafficking strategy aimed at discouraging drug consumption.

The world community in Comprehensive Multidisciplinary Outline adopted by the International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, held in 1987, set a number of recommendations to governmental and non-governmental agencies for preventing illicit drug trafficking [International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, n.d.]. On the national level agencies regulating television and radio broadcast, cinematography and other mass media should take the following actions:

- issue instructions in the form of a code, voluntary adherent for the mass media in questions of presenting or depicting the cases of drug addiction; ensure respect of international

instructions in this sphere;

- assign central and local drug-control agencies to appoint a person or a group of people in a certain territory or population centre responsible for keeping in touch with the mass media and provide them with information, and also consult them on drug addiction issues;
- promote cooperation between public authorities responsible for fulfilling anti-drug programmes and representatives of the mass media in the view of providing non-distorted by the press depiction of drug issues in films and the news;
- using their units and facilities engage the mass media into cooperation aimed at discouraging drug consumption.

Preparation materials for the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offender [Zharovska, 2016] suggest wider engagement of so called “social marketing”, that is to promote dissimulation of positive conduct models in the line with the principle “Say no to drugs” by distributing related materials and recommendations. The methodology employed [Profession of Journalism: Newspaper and Magazine, 2012, p. 74-77] may be oriented at facilitating discussions, dissimilating information, exercising influence on relationship, value system and creating a favourable climate for overcoming addictions and illegal practices. “Social marketing” must not necessarily lead to the change of operational model; it can change perception, attitude and thoughts that also contribute to anti-drug model of public policy, its strategy and tactic.

According to the documents of the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offender the police may play an important role in defining the character of information transmitted to the mass media. In many countries representatives of the mass media request the police data on committed drug-related crimes. The form of providing related information by the police defines the manner of dissimulation such information in social and political circles and at certain scale public reaction to certain event or related circumstances.

Generally, initial stage of awareness-raising campaign is well-known to almost every official and lies in transmitting certain information in any form (oral, written, graphic, visual etc.) [Limits of Legal Space For Freedom of the Press (Russian Debate with Participation of the Mass Media in Context of International Practice), 200811, p. 61]. Unfortunately, the campaign often is limited to this action; therefore its efficiency commonly is very low or even equates to zero (in those instances when information remains concealed or does not obtain dissimulation). If the message has sensational connotation, it can be echoed and dissimilated by the other entities, not directly connected to anti-drug campaign; some of them might comment, supplement or even distort initial material beyond recognition. The undertaking will start to develop spontaneously and may even lead to opposite unpredicted results (especially being transmitted

by Internet bots [Viliam, 2006]).

In order to achieve substantial (targeted) result it is important to plan the campaign in advance and implement it according to conceptualized framework that should take into consideration the following factor: time (start, development, termination of the campaign), place, the use of pauses, reinforcements, corrections etc. This requires the following essential elements:

- information itself (initial, developing, reinforcing, finalizing);
- mass media outlets, that will take active participation in fulfilling the elaborated plan;
- feedback (collection and analysis of data reflecting the impact of transmitted materials on the public, their further dissimulation among the public).

It can be deduced from the above that efficient awareness-raising anti-drug campaign requires thorough preparation as well as qualified executors. These two requirements are interrelated and under responsible approach can be completed to the maximum extent.

Anti-drug actions are put into practice according to the requirements set out in the previous part of the paper and encompass only regional specificity.

It should be noted, that local television and radio broadcast play a specific role in small towns or in certain remote localities; in such locations Internet has weaker impact, printed editions are almost unavailable.

At the field-level it is much more complicated than at the national level to acquire necessary information, select corresponding to the planned initiative mass media outlet and most importantly there might be no qualified staff members [Podshivalkina, Levinskiy, Miroshnichenko, 200113]. Therefore, planning and implementation of the initiative in the certain region should be carried out with participation of local experts and scientists (for instance, in capacity of consultants using telephone or other type of connection) [Serdyuk, 200214].

From the other side implementing anti-drug initiative at regional level is not as complicated as at the national level. As the rule, authorities of law enforcement agencies and the press maintain close contacts and get along easier in a particular population centre. Due to regular communication they can negotiate public initiatives easier and adjust their practical implementation.

It should be noted, that in particular regions and localities the impact of the initiated events on population may be more significant comparative to the centralized initiatives, because local mass media frequently have greater notice and trust of local population.

As for awareness-raising campaigns devoted to harmful consequence of drug addiction on human health, they should be exercised permanently. Increase or decrease of their intensity may only be connected with peculiarities of public perception, seasonal factors (for instance,

summer vacation) and other aspects. Such campaign should engage medical worker, scientists, educators, law enforcement and other public authorities, public organizations, popular artists and practically all types of the mass media (television, cinema, radio, computer networks, advertisement, visual agitation etc.), as well as editing (printed products).

Although such vast anti-drug campaigns go beyond direct police competence (nevertheless their implication is quite possible), let us review only specific possibilities in this area.

Awareness-raising anti-drug campaign (centralized as well as at the field-level) should be started from general problem statement. It is necessary to elaborate a detailed plan, which should encompass: approximate time of its implementation, available resources, field executors and authorities exercising general supervision. The plan should clearly define sources and time of release of the input information, manner of informational processing and its dosage, forms of its dissimulation, engaged mass media outlets and the time of their mobilization. Geographical scope, time of implementation of different stages, efficiency analysis of the achieved results, proper adjustments triggered by new circumstances (success, failure, obstacles, unexpected turnouts etc.) should also be provided.

5. Conclusions.

Summarizing, we would like to emphasize, that a vast awareness-raising campaign should take into account a great amount of factors, employ qualified experts and executors specifically trained for implementing such practices in their daily activities.

The foregoing gives rise to the following conclusions:

1. Drug trafficking situation has deteriorated significantly during the last years due to involvement of minor co-perpetrators into illicit drug trafficking, which subsequently increased drug consumption, first and foremost among children and the youth.

2. In conditions of wide dissemination of drug consumption preventive-oriented approach obtains particular relevance. Taking into account that in contemporary world the mass media have substantial influence on public views and consciousness, ensuring close cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the mass media is one of the important preconditions of efficient prevention of further dissemination of drug consumption. It should be emphasized that we are talking about cooperation instead of control, since administrative censorship of information will most likely lead to negative consequences due to free dissimulation of information in contemporary world.

3. Informational campaigns in the mass media must be directed at providing objective, complete and truthful information on the consequences of drug consumption, and contribute to creating positive conduct models connected with rejecting drug consumption and value system

focused at healthy lifestyle.

4. Preparation of informational campaigns should include not only preparation of informational materials, but also selection of efficient dissemination channels and ensuring efficient feedback.

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