

ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN COMBATING DRUG-RELATED CRIME

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Abstract. The *purpose* of the paper is to examine the role of 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 the 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, a prevention-oriented approach to combating drug-related crime gains a special significance. Secondly, the role of mass media in shaping public perceptions of certain issues, including drugs, makes them a necessary partner for the law enforcement agencies in deterring the 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 a healthy lifestyle, and discouraging drug consumption. We stress upon the necessity of the well-planned campaign, including not only the careful preparation of the information but also a 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 the importance of careful selection of partners in mass media, so that both sides of the partnership have a deep understanding of the issue they are working with. Lastly, we investigate the features of the information campaigns on the local level. *Value/originality.* The paper provides practical recommendations for setting up an informational campaign aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle and discouraging drug usage. Additionally, it provides the basis for the further research of the issues of police-mass media cooperation, in counteracting drug-related crimes in particular and in the prevention of antisocial and criminal behaviour in general.

Key words: police, mass media, information campaigns, drug-related crime, drug consumption.

JEL Classification: L65, K14

1. Introduction

Practice indicates that cooperation between law enforcement agencies and 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 an 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 the essential areas of cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the mass media. This derives primarily 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

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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 the 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 the 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 the 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 the 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 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 for 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, the 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, 20029). Furthermore, foreign experts indicate that, at the present moment, the 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 the 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 by introducing the most significant factors to the 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, the 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 a 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, a 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 the 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 an activity.

Nowadays an 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 the 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 websites, 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 essential 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 disseminate 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), 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 avoiding sensationalism.

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

- ✓ in order to achieve positive results, a healthy lifestyle free of drugs must be presented in an 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 a 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 a partnership relationship with:

- the heads of the printed editions (newspapers, magazines etc.), Internet-media, which contain regular columns dealing with the 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 a healthy lifestyle.

The tactic of engaging possibilities of the mass media constitutes only a part of the 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 a wider engagement of the so-called "social marketing", that is, to promote dissimulation of positive conduct models in line with the principle "Say no to drugs" by distributing related materials and recommendations. The methodology employed (Profession of Journalism: Newspaper and Magazine, 2012) may be oriented at facilitating discussions, dissimulating information, exercising influence on the 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 an 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 the certain scale public reaction to a certain event or related circumstances.

Generally, the initial stage of the 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), 2008). 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 a 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 a 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 an 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, the Internet has a 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, 2001). Therefore, planning and implementation of the initiative in the certain region should be carried out with the participation of local experts and scientists (for instance, in the capacity of consultants using the telephone or another type of connection) (Serdyuk, 2002).

From the other side, implementing an anti-drug initiative at the 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 the population may be more significant compared to the centralized initiatives because local mass media frequently have greater notice and trust of the local population.

As for awareness-raising campaigns devoted to the 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 the 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 the release of the input information, manner of information 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 number 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 the 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, a preventive-oriented approach obtains particular relevance. Taking into account that in contemporary world the mass media have a 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 the contemporary world.

3. Informational campaigns in the mass media must be directed to the provision of 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 a healthy lifestyle.

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

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