



Evaluation of Community-Oriented Enforcement Demonstration Projects

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has made considerable progress in preventing deaths and injuries by encouraging seat belt use and discouraging alcohol-impaired driving. One of the most effective countermeasures is high-visibility enforcement (HVE), a traffic safety approach designed to deter unlawful behaviors and promote voluntary behavior change in accordance with traffic laws. Over the past two decades, traffic safety programs have used HVE to change risky behaviors including non-use of seat belts and alcohol-impaired driving. However, there is still room for improvement. In 2019 some 47% of passenger vehicle occupants killed in crashes were unrestrained, and 28% of all traffic fatalities occurred in alcohol-impaired crashes.

NHTSA funded demonstrations of HVE enforcement to increase seat belt use in Norman, Oklahoma, and to decrease alcohol-impaired driving in Joplin, Missouri. The demonstrations focused on building community support for traffic safety enforcement with the rationale that greater support would help sustain the positive behavioral changes from HVE campaigns. Evaluations of the demonstrations included process components to assess implementation, and outcome components to assess changes in community attitudes about enforcement. In Norman, the evaluation also considered changes in seat belt use.

Site Selection

The demonstration projects required communities with populations from 50,000 to 200,000 residents and with primary local law enforcement agencies. The two programs used different methods to identify sites. For the seat belt use demonstration, the program team first selected a State and then a community in the State. The program team selected Oklahoma based on its primary front seat belt law, an observed seat belt use rate below the national average (86.6% versus 90.1% in 2016), and a rate of unbelted passenger vehicle fatalities above the national average (53% versus 48% in 2016). The program team then selected Norman

after discussions with the Oklahoma State Highway Safety Office and the Norman Police Department (NPD).

For the impaired-driving program site, the program team received 24 recommendations from the NHTSA Regional Offices based upon past participation in impaired-driving programs and strong enforcement. The program team selected Joplin from among a short list of 4 communities after discussions with the Missouri State Highway Safety Office and the Joplin Police Department (JPD).

The evaluation team selected control sites that were in the same States and of similar sizes to the demonstration communities but in different media markets. The control site for Norman was Broken Arrow, and the control for Joplin was Cape Girardeau.

Process Evaluation

In Norman, NPD and its community partners collaborated on a program that used the Data-Driven Approach to Crime and Traffic Safety (DDACTS). The program, called “Buckle Up Like a Champion Today,” ran from April 15, 2018, to July 15, 2019. NPD held four pre-intervention meetings with community stakeholders who showed interest in collaborating to plan outreach and enforcement activities. Initial plans involved activities for the schools, health-care systems, insurance companies, and automotive clubs. While NPD met with the community partners throughout the program, attendance diminished toward mid-program through the end. Many planned activities did not take place due to community partner disengagement and various other obstacles.

The media and enforcement efforts in Norman appeared consistent with previous community HVE campaigns. NPD continually disseminated press releases and social media postings on Facebook and Twitter, and there were more than two dozen earned media posts and articles relating to the NPD program that included seat belt use messages.

In Joplin, JPD and its community partners collaborated on an approach they called IMPACT (Injury Methods Practical Against Crime Trends) that used a program called “We Are Out There Too! Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over,” which ran from May 3, 2018, to August 2, 2019. JPD held two pre-intervention meetings with a group of community representatives. However, while community partners initially expressed interest, attendance dropped once the program began. While JPD remained active throughout the program period, the only community participants that remained active were two hospitals that displayed the program message on their closed-circuit screens.

Media efforts in Joplin appeared strong with 584 earned media posts and articles about the JPD program that included impaired-driving safety reminder messages, especially during holiday and special event periods. JPD also actively used social media throughout the program, resulting in more than 20,000 “reactions” on Facebook and Twitter. On the enforcement side, JPD suffered from staffing shortages, which may have contributed to a 23% decrease in the monthly average number of impaired-driving arrests during the program compared to the previous 3 years.

Outcome Evaluation

Public intercept surveys measured support for traffic safety laws and their enforcement through multiple questions administered at various locations throughout the community. For ease of interpretation, Table 1 presents the results comparing changes in responses representing the strongest support for additional traffic safety enforcement or the highest perceived risk of enforcement by comparing 2 weeks before it started (baseline) to mid-program and to 2 weeks after it ended (post).

Table 1. Changes in Attitudes About Traffic Enforcement

Question	Baseline	Baseline to Mid	Baseline to Post
Too little time enforcing traffic laws			
<i>Norman (program)</i>	10%	+6%*	-
<i>Broken Arrow (control)</i>	10%	+2%	+1%
<i>Joplin (program)</i>	15%	-1%	+2%
<i>Cape Girardeau (control)</i>	13%	-	+1%
Not wearing seat belts / drunk driving is a big problem			
<i>Norman (program)</i>	6%	+2%	+2%
<i>Broken Arrow (control)</i>	12%	-4%*	-6%*
<i>Joplin (program)</i>	20%	-2%	-
<i>Cape Girardeau (control)</i>	12%	-3%	+1%
Very likely drivers who don't wear seat belts will receive a ticket / have had too much to drink will be caught by police			
<i>Norman (program)</i>	18%	-4%	-1%
<i>Broken Arrow (control)</i>	16%	-	-3%
<i>Joplin (program)</i>	13%	+1%	+2%
<i>Cape Girardeau (control)</i>	14%	-	-5%
Strongly agree police are writing more seat belt tickets / arresting more drunk drivers than a few months ago			
<i>Norman (program)</i>	4%	-	NA
<i>Broken Arrow (control)</i>	3%	+3%	NA
<i>Joplin (program)</i>	5%	+1%	NA
<i>Cape Girardeau (control)</i>	4%	-1%	NA
Police catching people who don't wear seat belts / drunk drivers should be high priority			
<i>Norman (program)</i>	17%	+2%	+2%
<i>Broken Arrow (control)</i>	22%	-2%	+2%
<i>Joplin (program)</i>	71%	-6%*	-4%
<i>Cape Girardeau (control)</i>	67%	-4%	-
Strongly agree police should do more to encourage seat belt use / stop drunk driving			
<i>Norman (program)</i>	32%	-1%	-4%
<i>Broken Arrow (control)</i>	33%	-	-1%
<i>Joplin (program)</i>	42%	-5%	-3%
<i>Cape Girardeau (control)</i>	32%	-3%	-1%
Sample sizes			
<i>Norman (program)</i>	545	521	353
<i>Broken Arrow (control)</i>	449	353	307
<i>Joplin (program)</i>	475	435	380
<i>Cape Girardeau (control)</i>	364	343	313

Note: An asterisk (*) indicates statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level using a chi-squared test of independence ($df = 1$).

In general, support for additional traffic safety enforcement in the program sites did not increase. Respondents in Norman who indicated that the police spend too little time enforcing traffic laws increased from 10% before the program to 16% in the middle. However, contrary to expectations, Joplin respondents who indicated that police catching drunk drivers should be a high priority fell from 71% to 65%. The perceived risk of receiving a ticket for not wearing a seat belt or being arrested for driving drunk did not increase in the program sites, and respondents did not perceive additional enforcement during the program.

Observed seat belt use in Norman did not appear to increase because of the program. The belt use rate in Norman increased a statistically significant 1.9% from baseline to mid-program, but the rate in Broken Arrow increased a statistically significant 2.3% during the same period. Furthermore, at the end of the program, the belt use rate in Norman declined to below its baseline rate.

Conclusions

Community-oriented enforcement, as implemented in these two demonstrations, was not effective at building community support for traffic safety enforcement or increas-

ing the perceived risk of enforcement needed for HVE to be effective. The failure to increase the perceived risk of being punished for illegal behavior may have resulted from enforcement focused on areas of the community rather than suggesting that everyone in the community was at increased risk during the program. Results from Norman indicate that the 15-month high-visibility seat belt enforcement program in high crash and crime areas with large proportions of unbelted crash-involved occupants was not effective in increasing seat belt use rates and had no effect on community attitudes toward seat belt law enforcement. In Joplin, there was not enough program activity to increase community support for sustained impaired-driving law enforcement efforts.

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U.S. Department of Transportation
**National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration**
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590