



Deputy Emer Higgins
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

14th October 2020

Ref: PQ 27441/20

Dear Deputy Higgins,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to your above referenced Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health. .

HSE response to PQ ref 27441/20 : To ask the Minister for Health the evidence that demonstrates the impact of anti-smoker advertisements; if the evidence shows that hard hitting messages are more effective; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

The World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is an international treaty, ratified by Ireland in 2005, which aims to ensure national governments put in place consistent, coordinated and effective measures to protect the public's health. ¹ Evidence-based measures as recommended by the WHO through its MPOWER model include the recommendation to "warn about the dangers of tobacco". ²

The tobacco industry has a long history of using mass media to effectively promote consumption of tobacco products globally through heavy promotion, sponsorship, and product placement. It has communicated key messages about the perceived positive benefits of smoking (e.g. relaxation, social success and thinness) and countering concerns about dangers, as well as targeting certain populations. Tobacco advertising and promotion increase smoking initiation among youth, and exposure to tobacco product use in the movies is identified as a cause of youth smoking initiation.³

¹ World Health Organisation. WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. WHO. 2003.

² World Health Organisation. WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2008 – the MPOWER Package. WHO. 2008.

³ National Cancer Institute. The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use. Tobacco Control Monograph No. 19. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute. NIH Pub. No. 07-6242, June 2008.

For this reason, bans on tobacco advertising and promotion reduce tobacco use, are integral to tobacco control, and comprehensive approaches are required since partial bans can be circumvented by the tobacco industry.

Media can also be used to control tobacco use through warning people about the dangers and signposting them to smoking cessation services. Mass media campaigns, especially when delivered in conjunction with a comprehensive approach to tobacco control, are effective as part of wider communications and education in preventing smoking initiation and promoting smoking cessation.⁴

Campaign reach, intensity, duration and message type are key considerations. To be effective, a mass media campaign must reach sufficient numbers of people, especially in high-prevalence groups, with television a primary channel. In addition, inclusion of messages about the negative health effects of smoking, while stark, are more effective in changing smoking knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in a way that promotes quitting. A review of studies comparing different message types found negative health effects messages are most effective at generating increased knowledge, beliefs, positive perceived effectiveness ratings, or quitting behaviour, while there was more mixed evidence for other message types. A few studies further suggest that negative health effects messages may also contribute to reductions in socioeconomic disparities in smoking.⁵

A UK study explored the effects of campaigns with different types of emotive content on adult smoking prevalence and consumption. The study found that both types of campaign (positive and negative) are effective in reducing smoking prevalence, whereas consumption among smokers was only affected by campaigns evoking negative emotions⁶.

Since 2011, the HSE's Quit campaign has encouraged people who smoke to quit using the wide range of smoking cessation services offered by the HSE. This includes behavioural support and advice on Nicotine Replacement Therapy and Stop Smoking medication delivered by trained stop Smoking experts which can be accessed through face to face or group support, the Freephone QUITline, live chat, text, email or via social media.

During this time, the campaign has used a combination of messages ranging from hard-hitting to upbeat. It is important that mass media campaigns are refreshed regularly (every two to three years) in order to be effective in maintaining audience engagement. There is natural campaign 'burn-out' that occurs over time with all campaigns.

The Quit campaign began in 2011 with a strong personal testimony led approach, the 1 in 2 campaign, which used the startling statistic that 1 in 2 smokers will die from a tobacco related disease in order to encourage people who smoke to quit using HSE stop smoking supports.

⁴ Durkin S, Brennan E, Wakefield M Mass media campaigns to promote smoking cessation among adults: an integrative review Tobacco Control 2012;21:127-138.

⁵ Durkin S, Brennan E, Wakefield M Mass media campaigns to promote smoking cessation among adults: an integrative review Tobacco Control 2012;21:127-138.

⁶ Sims et al. Effectiveness of tobacco control television advertisements with different types of emotional content on tobacco use in England, 2004–2010. Tobacco Control 2016;25:21-26.

Gerry Collins, one of the people featured in the 1 in 2 campaign, was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. Gerry offered to share his story to encourage more people to give up smoking. This formed a new phase of the Quit campaign. Gerry died in 2014. The 'I wish I was an actor' campaign featuring Gerry, his family and friends, were a series of hard hitting ads, which were launched in early 2014 and ran for several years after his death.

In 2017, the 'I will survive' campaign highlighted the fact we now had more people who had quit smoking than people who smoke in Ireland and aimed to make smokers feel that they can join the former smokers they know, and get can help to do it. While the ads featured some real life smokers and quitters, it was a move away from the traditional personal testimony route.

While studies show that both negative and positive messages can be impactful, consultation with people who smoke provides valuable insights into the challenges they face when quitting smoking and the messages most likely to help them. This has been an important part of the development of each Quit campaign.

When developing the latest campaign, the HSE worked closely with people who smoke. A series of focus groups with different target audiences of people who smoke (including HSE staff) were held. In addition to this, stop smoking advisors from around the country were consulted.

The research informed the 'The Last Stop' campaign which launched in January 2020. The campaign uses the voices of real life smokers to challenge common excuses for continuing to smoke. It reframes the challenge of quitting with a tangible goal and the message that quitting for 28 days makes people five times more likely to quit for good.

Overall, investment in mass media campaigns to warn about the harms caused by smoking as part of a comprehensive tobacco control programme is good value for money.⁷ In the UK, for example, it was found that a 10% increase in mass media expenditure lead to a 0.5% increase in the success rates of quit attempts.⁸

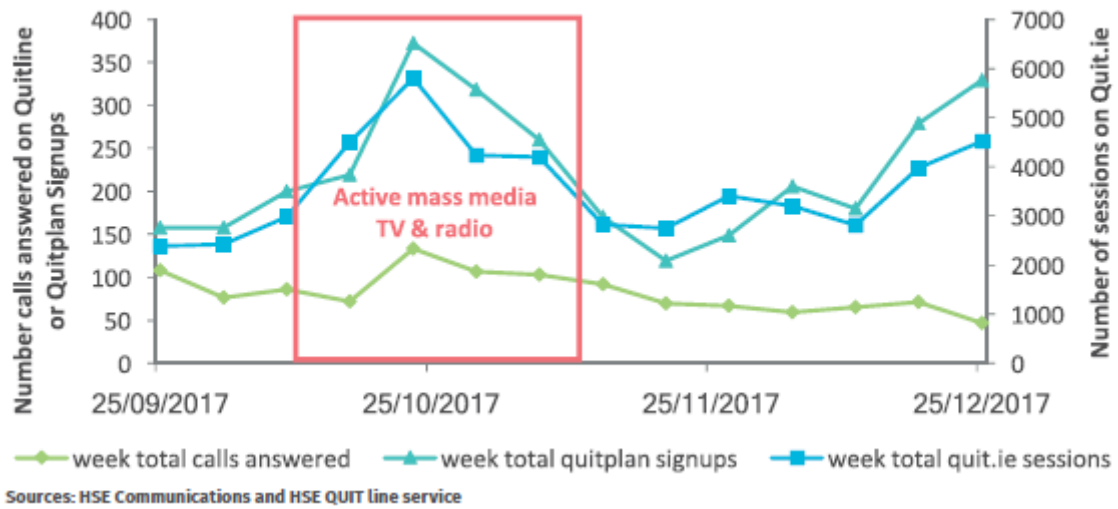
The figure below (extracted from the HSE State of Tobacco Control report⁹) demonstrates how HSE mass media campaigns have impacted on demand for smoking cessation support, for example, a mass media campaign was active on television from 23rd October to 12th November 2017 and on radio from 23rd October to 5th November 2017. Figure 44 demonstrates the impact on demand for Quit services: compared with the average activity in the preceding 4 weeks, there was a 56% increase in calls to the QUIT helpline, an 89% increase in sessions on the QUIT website and a 102% increase in QUIT Plan sign-ups, following commencement of the mass media campaign.

⁷ Atusingwize E, Lewis S, Langley T Economic evaluations of tobacco control mass media campaigns: a systematic review Tobacco Control 2015;24:320-327.

⁸ Kuipers MAG, Beard E, West R, et al Associations between tobacco control mass media campaign expenditure and smoking prevalence and quitting in England: a time series analysis Tobacco Control Published Online First: 30 June 2017. doi: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2017-053662.

⁹ Tobacco Free Ireland Programme HSE. State of Tobacco Control in Ireland. 2018. HSE.

Figure 44: Demonstration of the impact of mass media campaigns on demand for Quit services, September-end to December 2017.



I hope this information is of assistance to you. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Martina Blake

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