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RAISING THE AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF ROAD SAFETY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH THE STORIES OF TRAFFIC ACCIDENT VICTIMS WITH SPINAL INJURIES

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Abstract: VOZIM, The Institute for Innovative Safe Driving Education (Zavod za inovativno izobraževanje o varni vožnji) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization from Slovenia that was established in 2010 with the purpose of promoting the international movement “I still drive – but I don't walk” (“Še vedno vozim – vendar ne hodim”). The idea of the development of the movement emerged due to the large number of people that were injured in traffic accidents in Slovenia that are now in wheel chairs due to their severe spinal injuries. Our members with spinal injuries resulting from traffic accidents share their stories at workshops with the youngsters with the purpose of raising awareness on the importance of road safety.

Emphasis is given to the young individuals between the age of 15 and 22 that are undergoing secondary school education. It was found when reviewing the prevention actions to ensure safety in road traffic that despite the fact that it is particularly the group of secondary school students that are most actively involved in road traffic, content on this issue is short in high schools in Slovenia. At the same time, the formation of the “I still drive – but I don't walk” project was also influenced by the fact that the average age of our members on the day of their injury in a traffic accident was only 22.

It was found in the research titled “The influence of the lectures by the VOZIM Institute “I still drive – but I don't walk” on the drivers’ safe behaviour” that the “drivers who DID attend the lectures by the VOZIM Institute “I still drive – but I don't walk” were safer drivers when compared to the control group.

Since 2015, the lectures “I still drive – but I don't walk” are being successfully carried out in Serbia under the name “I still drive” (“Još uvek vozim”) which points to the opportunities of including traffic accident victims in the implementation of preventive activities for the young, in other countries as well.

Key words: The VOZIM Institute (Zavod VOZIM), Road safety, Raising awareness among the young, “I still drive – but I don't walk” (“Še vedno vozim – vendar ne hodim”), Driver Behaviour Questionnaire

1. INTRODUCTION

Traffic accidents among the young between the age of 15 and 29 are still the leading cause of death (WHO, 2015). The Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Road Safety (AVP) found that young people as persons responsible for traffic accidents contributed an above-average share, whereas young persons between age 18 and 24 also stood out in comparison with the number of persons responsible with regard to the number of driver's licence holders divided by age groups (the likelihood of causing a traffic accident with a deadly outcome is three times higher with young people between the age of 18 and 24 than in the case of an average driver) (<https://www.avp-rs.si/preventiva/svetovalnica/mladostniki-in-mladi/>, 23/08/2016).

There are certain contributing factors that are especially visible with the young:

- lack of driving experience which is especially important in critical situations;
- general lifestyle of the young and other motifs, as they are more likely to drive a vehicle for fun, leisure, under riskier circumstances (at night, tired, under the influence of alcohol, under peer pressure);
- the use of various audio and mobile devices in traffic as well;
- personal and developmental characteristics of the young (defying authority, testing one's own limits and capabilities, lack of awareness of the possible consequences etc.) (<https://www.avp-rs.si/preventiva/svetovalnica/mladostniki-in-mladi/>, 23/08/2016).

We can notice the trends in the number of traffic accidents and the consequences of traffic accidents from 2001 to 2015 among the young aged between 18 and 24 (inclusively). It is possible to detect a significant decrease in the number of traffic accidents by 77% (comparison 15/01) and the number of accidents resulting in severe bodily injuries by 71%. The comparison between the years 2014 and 2015 is indeed encouraging in light of the decrease in the number of traffic accidents (decrease by 7%), but still worrying with regard to the number of casualties

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where we record an increase by 67%, and the number of traffic accidents resulting in severe bodily injuries where the increase amounts to 17%.

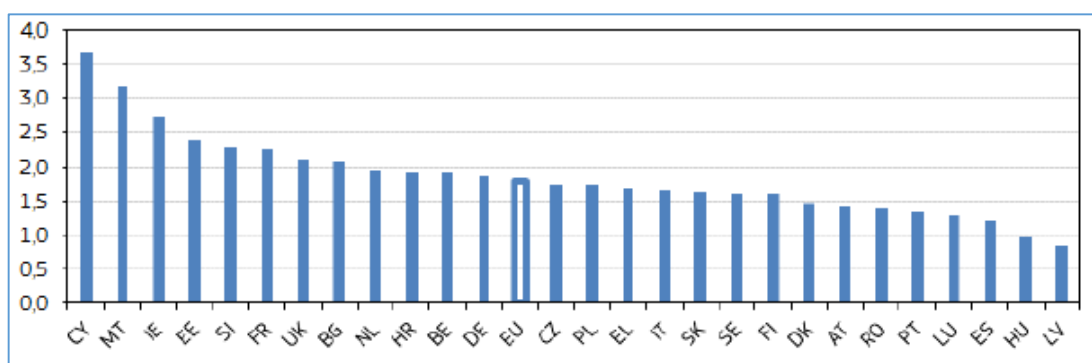


Figure 1. Death rate among the young (age 18–24) per EU countries (data until May 2015) (European Commission, 2015).

Table 1. Traffic accidents and the consequences among the young between the age of 18 to 24 (inclusively), (Source: AVP 2016).

YEAR	No. of traffic accidents	No. of traffic accidents resulting in injury (S+H+L)	Consequences			Total injur. (H+L)
			Death	Severe bod. inj.	Slight bod. inj.	
2001	15,278	4,091	52	635	2,977	3,612
2002	15,030	4,440	57	347	3,568	3,915
2003	15,637	5,210	51	283	4,624	4,907
2004	16,334	5,711	49	283	5,268	5,551
2005	11,039	4,259	44	265	3,557	3,822
2006	10,735	4,449	54	249	3,942	4,191
2007	9,939	4,413	64	267	3,724	3,991
2008	7,232	3,232	38	188	2,762	2,950
2009	6,436	3,027	30	185	2,674	2,859
2010	6,037	2,435	19	140	2,034	2,174
2011	6,018	2,250	17	149	1,799	1,948
2012	4,991	1,922	19	110	1,606	1,716
2013	4,021	1,687	21	79	1,458	1,537
2014	4,076	1,668	9	93	1,337	1,430
2015	3,805	1,699	15	109	1,364	1,473
Comparison 15/14	-7%	2%	67%	17%	2%	3%
Comparison 15/01	-75%	-58%	-71%	-83%	-54%	-59%
Comparison 15/07	-62%	-62%	-77%	-59%	-63%	-63%

Thus, when talking about traffic accidents we must not focus only on those with a deadly outcome, but also on traffic accidents resulting in severe bodily injuries that permanently alter an individual's way and quality of life. A high number of victims of traffic accidents in Slovenia that are chained to a wheel chair due to a severe bodily injury – spinal chord injury – has sparked the idea in 2008 on the “I still drive – but I don't walk” movement that has been implemented since 2010 within the scope of VOZIM, Institute for Innovative Safe Driving Education (VOZIM Institute).

Emphasis is given to the young individuals between the age of 15 and 22 that are undergoing secondary school education. It was found when reviewing the prevention actions to ensure safety in road traffic that despite the fact that it is particularly the group of secondary school students that are most actively involved in road traffic, content on this issue is short in high schools in Slovenia. At the same time, the formation of the “I still drive – but I don't walk” project was also influenced by the fact that the average age of our members on the date of their injury in a traffic accident was only 22. Through the stories of the injured persons – disabled persons, we wish to provide a different way for the young to be introduced to road safety – through the stories of those that have experienced traffic accidents resulting in severe bodily injuries.

We provide persons with spinal injuries that are consequently disabled and will spend their lives in a wheel chair with the opportunity to act in the field of traffic and young people by sharing their stories and to integrate themselves back to everyday life after the injury more quickly and set a new position in society for themselves. A lot of research shows the negative effects of social exclusion, especially with regard to the mental health of marginalized individuals (Honey et al., 2011).

As mentioned, we have been already carrying out preventive “I still drive – but I don’t walk” workshops since 2008, and expanded our activity to Serbia in 2015 where the project is run under the name “I still drive” (“Još uvek vozim”).

Due to the above, VOZIM, Institute for Innovative Safe Driving Education, is aware of the importance of educating the young and the influence of such education on their safer behaviour in traffic (when driving). Due to the above, a research was carried out in the field of “The influence of the lectures by the VOZIM Institute “I still drive – but I don’t walk” on the drivers’ safe behaviour” that address the problem of dangerous drivers – young dangerous drivers that are mostly still unskilled at driving or are even inadequately educated or arrogant.

2. MATERIALS OF THE METHOD

In this part, we present the work and key activities of VOZIM, Institute for Innovative Safe Driving Education, that have been upgraded since the beginning of the movement in 2008. The basic mission is based on the professional approach, applied methods and evaluation of activities (MODULE CLOSE-TO 2010, Driver Behaviour Questionnaire 2016). With comprehensive, quality and efficient programmes and professionally qualified personnel, we influence young people in the following areas:

- Young people: Through the stories of persons injured in traffic accidents at the “I still drive – but I don’t walk” lectures, we raise their awareness on the importance of road safety and compliance with the traffic regulations. Their interaction with disabled persons contributes to dismantling the taboo on disablement.
- Disabled persons (paraplegics, tetraplegics), persons injured in traffic accidents: The integration and inclusion of people with spinal injuries in preventive activities in the field of road safety contributes to their faster rehabilitation after the injury and their position as youth workers in the field of road safety. In order to attain such a position, they are included in the “I still drive Academy”, where they receive training and education in rhetoric, appearing before the public, traffic, youth psychology etc.
- General public: We raise the awareness of the greater general public with media campaigns and cooperation with reporters with calls for compliance with traffic regulations and presentations of stories of injured persons.

In the implementation of the research “The influence of the lectures by the VOZIM Institute “I still drive – but I don’t walk” on the drivers’ safe behaviour”, a research model was applied on the basis of which differences were studied between the traffic-safety behaviour of drivers that attended the “I still drive – but I don’t walk” lectures and those that did not. In March 2016, an anonymous online survey was carried out among Slovenian drivers of personal vehicles. Part of the questions also encompassed the translation of the globally-acknowledged questionnaire Driver Behaviour Questionnaire on the basis of which it can be determined the level of safe behaviour of an individual in road traffic (Topolšek and Cvahte, 2016).

3. RESULTS

The beginnings of our activities in the field of road safety are related to the development of the “I still drive – but I don’t walk” preventive workshop that is carried out by persons injured in traffic accidents that have suffered spinal injury as a consequence (and therewith were diagnosed with paraplegia or tetraplegia). Workshops are carried out with the use of audio and visual materials with which the injured person (lecturer) acquaints the young with his/her life, the traffic accident, the cause for it and life after the traffic accident and the permanent consequences related to it (spinal injury). The young people become acquainted with the worst causes of traffic accidents, the possible consequences of these accidents, and with the concept of paraplegia and tetraplegia and life in a wheel chair that is related to it. This part is especially important for tackling the stereotype of disablement. Learners (young people) actively co-design the content of the lectures through the discussion that is promoted at these events. Learners give their evaluations in evaluation questionnaires.



Figure 2. The “I still drive – but I don't walk” (“Še vedno vozim – vendar ne hodim”) workshop is carried out by a victim of a traffic accident.

Based on the detected needs, especially the observations and the wishes of the school professional workers, we have upgraded a workshop that lasts for one school hour with contents on harmful alcohol consumption and testing of the Drunk Busters goggles that demonstrate the different levels of drunkenness and the consequential influence of alcohol on cognition. This way, we have extended the workshop to two school hours (Table 2).

Table 2. We carried out two workshops of the “I still drive – but I don't walk” (“Še vedno vozim – vendar ne hodim”).

Workshop format	Duration	Content
Basic	45–60min	Through the lecturer's story, his/her life before and after the traffic accident that chained him/her to a wheel chair, the young become acquainted with the importance of road safety. The workshop is upgraded with raising awareness on negative alcohol consumption and is concluded with eventual questions put forward by learners or with a discussion.
With Drunk Busters goggles	60–90min	The basic workshop “I still drive – but I don't walk” has been upgraded with the presentation of Drunk Busters goggles that simulate the different levels of drunkenness and the presence of psychoactive substances in an organism. The young people can safely test how severely alcohol and other psychoactive substances weaken an individual's capacities of cognition and movement in space.

Table 3 shows the rise in the interest for the performance of the “I still drive – but I don't walk” workshops in high schools and elementary schools across Slovenia. In the school year of 2011/12 when we started to systematically record the number of performed workshops and the number of learners, we carried out 44 workshops for 3,183 learners, and in the school year of 2015/16, we carried out 122 workshops for 9,204 learners. Meanwhile, in Serbia, they carried out 80 “I still drive” (“Još uvek vozim”) workshops for 6,120 young persons in the school year of 2015/16.

Table 3. The number of the “I still drive – but I don't walk” (“Še vedno vozim – vendar ne hodim”) workshops carried out as well as the students.

School year	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number of workshops	44	64	73	100	122
Number of young persons	3,183	4,612	5,549	7,560	9,204
Increase in the no. of young persons compared to the previous school year		+44.1%	+20.3%	+36.2%	+21.7%

As mentioned before, the preventive workshops are carried out by the persons injured in traffic accidents – disabled persons. In order to achieve a professional approach, they are included in the “I still drive Academy” programme within the scope of which we carry out systematic education of lecturers in the field of appearing before the public, computer literacy, youth work and youth psychology, road safety etc. By performing preventive workshops and providing membership in our organization, we encourage disabled persons to be

active in the field of prevention actions to ensure safety in road traffic, acquiring new competencies and developing social competencies, and especially, to become more emancipated. The main issues are motivation, personal growth through newly-acquired experience, functional knowledge and competencies, assistance in overcoming personal difficulties and problems as well as the promotion of health preservation. At the same time, they are given the opportunity to actively participate in the preparation and performance of various projects and their management which allows them to acquire organizational knowledge.



Figure 3. Education of lecturers within the scope of the “I still drive Academy”.

We also alert the general public of the preventive and media campaigns, as safety as a value concerns all of us. Injured persons act as VOZIM Institute ambassadors and share their life stories in various interviews for newspapers as well as TV and radio stations. This way we transfer the issue that is primarily concerned with the young into a wider discussion. As the same time, the representatives of the general public approach the movement as volunteers that can actively participate in the co-creation of projects and contribute to their performance.

As mentioned, our preventive action and contents are primarily dedicated to the young. The MODULE CLOSE TO research that monitored road safety preventive programmes between 2007 and 2010 based on the “peer to peer” principle in 11 countries found that 70.5% and 96.4% respondents replied positively to the question “Do you think that this question had an impact on your behaviour in traffic?” and “Would you recommend these lectures for the education of future drivers?”, even during the course of the months after the lectures were concluded (Final Report MODULE CLOSE TO 2007–2010, 2010).

In the beginning of 2016, we again researched the question whether the “I still drive- but I don’t walk” workshops influenced young drivers and their behaviour in traffic when compared to the control group. We reached out to the Faculty of Logistics of the University of Maribor where they conducted a research with the application of the Behaviour Questionnaire among the young that have learned from our workshops in the past and the group that had not attended our workshops. It was found in the research titled “The influence of the lectures by the VOZIM Institute “I still drive – but I don’t walk” on the drivers’ safe behaviour” that the “drivers that DID attend the lectures by the VOZIM Institute “I still drive – but I don’t walk” are safer drivers. The behaviour analysis that was carried out based on the globally acknowledged DBQ questionnaire (Driver Behaviour Questionnaire) shows that there are differences with regard to safe behaviour in traffic among those that DID and those that DID NOT attend such lectures. However, we also summarize another important part, namely, that the respondents that DID attend this type of lecture were satisfied with its effect and that they supported the idea of such lectures becoming a mandatory part of the training for beginner drivers. The students in these lectures believe that they are safer drivers because they attended these lectures. We therefore stress in conclusion that the “I still drive – but I don’t walk” lectures by the VOZIM Institute are important and have a significant impact on the higher level of safe behaviour of drivers! (Topolšek and Cvahte, 2016).

4. DISCUSSION

The performance of preventive activities based on the “I still drive – but I don’t walk” model are, in addition to Slovenia, being carried out in Serbia as well (under the scope of the Association of paraplegics and tetraplegics of Serbia – Savez paraplegičara i kvadriplegičara Srbije). In our work, the connections and cooperation in the scope of various projects with other stakeholders that are active in road safety is of key importance, as we can

together reach out to a larger number of young people and at the same time form a unified front and demonstrate a common goal, i.e. lowering the number of casualties and the number of severely injured persons among the young.

oziroma ni bilo vsec, ipd.):
Predavanje mi je zelo koristilo, saj sem od tega trenutka naprej
prepričan, da bom v prometu upošteval predpise, telefon izklapil
ter ostal trezen. Hvala vam! Se že veselim varne vožnje :)

Figure 4. Opinions on the “I still drive – but I don't walk” (“Še vedno vozim – vendar ne hodim”) workshop: “I found the lecture useful, as I am, from this moment on, certain that I will comply with the traffic regulations, turn off my telephone and remain sober. Thank you I am looking forward of a safe ride ☺

The “peer to peer” approach and raising awareness through the stories of persons injured in traffic accidents has proven to be effective, both from the perspective of the young that attend the workshops as well as for the injured persons (paraplegics and tetraplegics) with regard to their integration and social inclusion. It is precisely due to the changes of the impact that the significance of the continuous and subsequent (repeated) evaluation needs to be stressed.

5. CONCLUSION

Statistical data on road safety among the young show that young people between the age of 15–29 mostly die because of the consequences of traffic accidents which is why we need to pay special attention to this age group when addressing prevention actions to ensure safety in road traffic. Given our experience, the presentation of road safety through the stories of the injured persons that are in a wheel chair due to the consequences of traffic accidents, touches the young on a personal and emotional level, and also ends up reaching and leaving a stronger impression that e.g. a traffic workshop carried out by a policeman or a professor. We must keep in mind that defiance toward authority is typical for this age group of the young people.

Another moment that should also be pointed out is the opportunity for the inclusion of disabled persons, the persons injured in traffic accidents, in preventive activities and therefore, a form of rehabilitation after injury.

The transfer of practice from Slovenia to Serbia and the successful performance of the activities point to the opportunities of including traffic accident victims and the performance of preventive activities for the young in other countries as well.

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