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The media landscape is changing rapidly. How is it influencing health and safety in nightlife? And how can public health professionals apply media for the best? In trying to answer this question we started with a **literature review**. This review was conducted in 2010 – 2011, searching academic databases and grey literature. It targets public health professionals to think about media opportunities and thresholds for their work in harm reduction and prevention for risk behaviour in nightlife.

Additional lines of thought and information sources come from the Club Health thematic conference: Media Influence in Nightlife (Brussels, 2010). Presentations and reports from this conference can be found at www.club-health.eu.

The theoretical insights led to the development of **practical guidelines and recommendations** targeted at public health workers for a best fit-for-purpose media usage.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Media Landscape research

Young people rely principally on the internet for information about psychoactive substances, which implies that emerging substances and use trends are detected by youth ahead of the legal system or researchers. Additionally, with regard to sexual health, there are indications that the media are providing a premier, non-threatening source of information for youth. However, not all the information is professionally produced and young people are not only consumers of mass media but have also become producers of it. Thus there is the implication in the historical sense that for the first time there is access to the spreading blueprint of behaviour that previously might have surfaced briefly and then disappeared.

## **Health promotion campaigns**

Dealing with media and prevention in nightlife, professionals should realise that new media technologies could just be the kiss of death for big media and broadcasting campaigns, since with a fragmented media landscape, an increased offer of television channels

and digital TV features limits viewers' exposure to such campaigns.

Media technology research

Media technology is here to stay and has fundamentally changed our forms of communication. Even though they can have negative repercussions for public health, we find potential in the work for a safe and fun nightlife environment.

#### **Press releases**

Ideally mainstream media should perform the task of a responsible instigator of debate with an appropriate framework and objective information, however public health officials often complain about erroneous and exaggerated use of terminology and the amplification and over-simplification of health issues. However, in an atmosphere of intensified competition, declining editorial resources and organisational constraints, journalists have been forced to increase their output, which has led to a growing dependence on public relations practitioners and press releases. This opens a window for influencing news coverage from a public health point of view.

### **Training**

Besides understanding the selection criteria for a newsworthy story, researchers, prevention workers and emergency officials need to understand the quality control mechanisms in reporting when they pass on sensitive information concerning public health. This could be established during basic media training. On the other hand, journalists and journalism students would benefit from workshops in basic prevention and public health promotion. This could eventually pave the way for attracting journalists to specialise in the theme of public health as public health reporters at present might cover sports one day and culture the next. This would in turn lead to closer alliances between public health and media stakeholders instigating reciprocity of practices for the benefit of general public health promotion.

## **Advertising**

This review disregards the societal debate around alcohol advertising as this is extensively discussed elsewhere. However, advertising for daily products are also often linked to youth subcultures with references to substance

use and sexual behaviour, impacting on social norms and false perceptions.

#### **Media education**

Growing up into adulthood, youth are consuming media like tapeworms and often we underestimate youths' ability for critical assessment. We can add to their media skills through media education. Media education can diminish the negative effects media can have and works twofold. First, one is able to decipher a media message rather than accept it at face value and secondly media literacy enables the media user to make profound choices about their own media usage.

Reference: Jongbloet, J., van der Kreeft, P. & Van Havere, T. (2011). Media influence on health and safety in nightlife: literature review.

### **PRACTICAL GUIDELINES**

Ever since the printing press came into operation, media mass production has been subject to societal debate with the pivotal question focusing on how mass media influence social behaviour. Also in nightlife, the arena for experimental youth behaviour, the media have an equivocal impact. In the hedonistic nightlife atmosphere very broad media channels are successfully applied for commercial gain, but often at the expense of general public health. Public health workers often refrain from media use because they fear losing the battle. We believe however that the mediatised society offers exciting possibilities for counteraction, strengthening our health improvement efforts. We propose general guidelines for miscellaneous media use for the purpose of health promotion in nightlife.

Do you want to know more about engaging in mass media? Or about targeting party people? Check the Club Health practical guidelines on media influence at club-health.eu.



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