



A Randomized Trial of Victim Impact Panels' DWI Deterrence Effectiveness

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INTRODUCTION

Victim Impact Panels (VIPs), initiated by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), have become a common component in sentencing DWI offenders, particularly first-time Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) offenders. VIPs typically consist of a panel of individuals, organized by MADD, who have directly experienced the negative consequences of DWI and alcohol-related crashes, or have had family members experience these negative consequences. The panel usually presents their experiences and stories to an audience of first-time DWI offenders. The presentations are often emotional, detailed, and graphic, and focus on the tragic negative consequences of DWI and alcohol-related crashes. One key message given in the VIP presentations is that being convicted of DWI represents a bad decision that an individual makes, but that the individual him/herself is not a "bad person." As such, a strong empathetic message is delivered within the overall VIP presentation. The core question in this investigation is whether attending a VIP reduces subsequent drinking and driving and DWI recidivism. Potentially, if the panels are found to be effective in reducing subsequent DWI, VIPs represent an important, cost-effective, and widely diffused DWI prevention intervention. Prior to the investigation reported here, no systematic and controlled trial of VIPs has been undertaken

METHODS

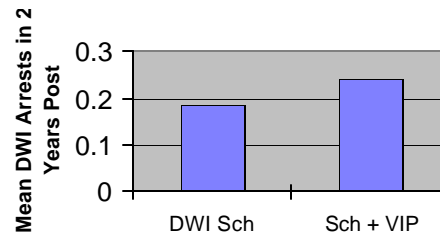
Participants. Convicted drunk drivers (N=833) thought to be first-time DWI offenders in Bernalillo County, New Mexico in 1995 were recruited for participation in the current study. Participants were randomly assigned to either: (1) standard six-session DWI School curriculum used throughout New Mexico (DWI Sch group, n=407), or (2) the DWI School curriculum plus attendance at a Victim Impact Panel (Sch +VIP group, n=426). Demographic data for the participants indicated that they were 75% male, 25% female, and in terms of ethnicity were 46% Hispanic, 36% Anglo, 12% Native Amer., 2% Black, 4% Other.

Design. The design employed in the investigation was a randomized 2 (group: DWI school only vs. DWI school + VIP) x 4 (time: pretest-posttest-one year follow-up-two year follow-up) mixed factorial with participants randomly assigned to the group factor. Participants were administered questionnaires at pretest, immediate post-intervention, and at one-year and two-year follow-up intervals. Information on prior and subsequent arrests and convictions were obtained from computerized Traffic Safety records. These records revealed that approximately one-fifth (165 or 21%) of these individuals had received at least one other, prior DWI arrest besides the DWI that resulted in their entering our study.

RESULTS

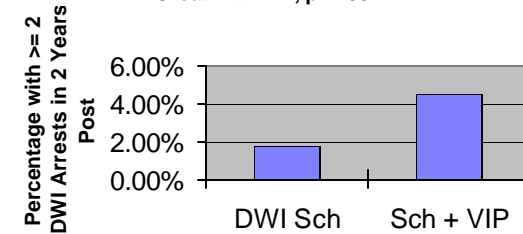
Results from analyses on an array of alcohol, drinking and driving, and traffic safety variables yielded a number of findings. First, results on alcohol and drinking and driving variables from immediate post-intervention assessments indicated that generally, the Sch + VIP participants reported significantly less ($p < .01$) days drinking and drinking and driving and days drinking 5 or more drinks and driving after five or more drinks than the DWI Sch group. However, these differences were not detected at one year or two year follow-up assessment points. When traffic safety data were analyzed, several findings that were contrary to expectations emerged. First, as seen below, mean subsequent arrests for DWI reflected a trend toward significance such that the Sch + VIP group had a higher mean number of DWI arrests at the two year follow-up assessment point than did the DWI Sch group.

Mean Subsequent Arrests Tend to be Higher for VIP Group, $p = .058$

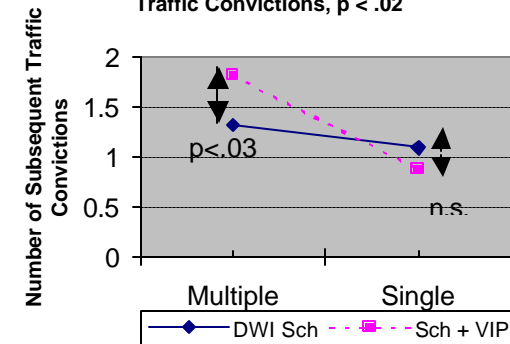


Another analysis indicated that the odds of having two or more DWI arrests at the two year follow-up assessment point were significantly greater for the Sch + VIP group than DWI Sch group. Finally, a set of analyses were performed that examined whether there would be differences between true first-time offenders (those with no prior convictions according to our examination of traffic safety data) and multiple DWI offenders (those with actual prior offenses) in our trial. Results indicated that single vs. multiple offender status interacted with treatment group such that the multiple offenders who attended VIPs had significantly higher subsequent traffic convictions than did multiple offenders who attended DWI school only. No differences between single offenders for both experimental groups was detected.

Odds of 2 or more DWI Arrests Twice as Great with VIP, $p < .05$



Treatment Group Interacts with Number of Prior Traffic Convictions, $p < .02$



DISCUSSION

These results indicate that Victim Impact Panel experiences have desired effects immediately post intervention. However, after an extended period, VIP participants had higher rates of DWI arrests than non-VIP participants. The interaction between offender status and VIP experience suggests that VIP interventions are inappropriate for multiple offenders. Even though VIPs are not meant to be confrontational, participants may perceive them to be so. Consequently, these results may be similar to those in treatment outcomes studies (cf. Miller, 2000; Miller, Benefield & Tonigan, 1993) where confrontational therapist styles result in higher client drinking.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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