Karolinska Institutet

Institutionen för folkhälsovetenskap, Socialmedicin

PUBLIC ROAD SAFETY POLICY CHANGE AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION – Vision Zero a road safety policy innovation

AKADEMISK AVHANDLING
som för avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen vid Karolinska Institutet offentligen försvaras i Norrbacka, Aulan, Karolinska universitetssjukhusområdet i Solna, mot Norra länken

Fredag den 25 maj 2012, kl 13.00

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ABSTRACT

It has been estimated that, worldwide, the number of people killed in road traffic crashes each year is almost 1.2 million, while the number of injured could be as high as 50 million. Although road traffic injuries make up a very complex area, comprehensive knowledge of the magnitude of the road safety problem and important risk factors, and also theoretical and practical experiences of effective road safety strategies and measures, have been developed over the years. However, we still lack systematic knowledge about the way governments in different time periods have tried to tackle this major public health problem. **Aims:** The overall aim of this thesis is to increase knowledge of road traffic safety public policies and their implementation. This is achieved by exploring Vision Zero as a safety policy of this kind. The policy was adopted by the Swedish parliament in October 1997. **Methods:** The thesis comprises four studies, based on a policy analysis approach, where studies I and II focus on policy, and III and IV on policy implementation. For all four studies, a case study method was utilized, including both single and multiple case studies. For all the studies, documents produced by governmental bodies were utilized as the main source of information, and the contents of these documents were analyzed. For studies I and IV, a policy theory approach was adopted in order to analyze the ideas underpinning Vision Zero as a public policy, and safety cameras as a road safety policy instrument. For studies II and III, an evaluation approach was adopted. **Findings:** In study I it is shown that Vision Zero is a politically adopted road safety public policy with broad political support. Vision Zero as a road safety policy does not only present a long-term goal, but also represents an innovative and radical approach to the promotion of an alternative framework. According to study II, politically adopted road safety goals, embodied in general and quantified time-bounded targets, are policy strategies that have evolved since the beginning of the 1970s in Sweden. Three adopted road safety targets were identified, and all were specific, measurable, time-bounded, and at least theoretically achievable. However, it seems that the targets adopted in 1996 and 1998 were, compared with the general historical trend, more or less unrealistic. According to study III, Vision Zero exhibits a fundamentally new approach to the allocation of responsibilities for the prevention of traffic injuries. The responsibility for road safety should be shared between road users and system designers, according to the principle that the system designers should always have ultimate responsibility. Thus, Vision Zero as a public policy envisages a chain of responsibility that both begins and ends with the system designers. According to study III, this principle of responsibility has only been minimally implemented in formal legislation. Although the principle of responsibility has not been fully implemented, there is an on-going implementation process through which other less intrusive policy instruments have been pursued. In study IV, it is shown that even though the speed camera system in Victoria, Australia and the Swedish system technically have the same aim – to reduce speeding – ideas on how that should be achieved differ substantially. The Swedish approach to safety cameras appears to be based on the beliefs that road safety is an important priority for road users, and that one of the reasons why road users drive too fast is a lack of information and social support. Accordingly, the underlying aim of the intervention is to support and create a new social norm among drivers, namely that it is easier and better to follow the speed limits. **In Conclusion**: Vision Zero is a politically adopted policy, which is founded in the clear ethical stance that everyone has the right to use roads and streets without threats to life or health. The adoption of difficult or even unrealistic quantified targets may serve as a management tool, and inspire stakeholders to do more than they would otherwise have done. Setting time-bounded quantified targets is, therefore, a policy action in itself, aimed at motivating different stakeholders. The underlying rationale is not directly to achieve the goals and the targets per se, but to increase public awareness of the road safety problem, and thereby impose pressure on stakeholders to strengthen their efforts. Although, according to Vision Zero, system designers have the ultimate responsibility for safety, this principle of responsibility has been only minimally implemented in formal legislation. There are major differences between the ideas underlying the speed camera programs in Victoria, Australia and Sweden, and these ideas have an impact on the actual design of the different systems, and how they are intended to have road safety effects.

Key words: Vision Zero, public policy, public policy implementation, policy analysis, policy instruments, case study, policy theory, road safety

ISBN 978-91-7457-743-3