

# Operation safe crossing: using science within a community intervention

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## **Abstract**

**AIMS:** To evaluate a large drunk-driving enforcement program at the US/Mexican border to reduce the number of youths crossing the border to drink in Tijuana. This paper also describes the research data used to develop and manage the program. Data from a border breath-test survey were used to dramatize the problem and gain public support for action. The data were also used to help design the enforcement effort and measure progress in reducing the cross-border drinking problem. **DESIGN:** The number of news events generated around the occurrence of special enforcement efforts were used to measure project activity and to predict changes in the numbers of youths crossing into Mexico, their returning BACs and reductions in alcohol-related crashes during a 3-year period. **SETTING:** An urban county on the Mexican border. **PARTICIPANTS:** Underage youths aged 18-20 years and young adults aged 21-30 years residing in San Diego County. **MEASUREMENTS:** Immigration and Naturalization Services provided population counts of the number of individuals crossing each weekend night from Tijuana into the United States through the San

Ysidro border facility. Breath-test surveys of a random sample of these returning crossers provided data on the number of US residents visiting bars and nightclubs in Tijuana and on alcohol consumption at Tijuana bars and nightclubs. Night-time had-been-drinking crash data involving young drivers in several California counties served as an outcome measure of public health and safety. FINDINGS: Analysis of data involving more than 2 million pedestrians returning from Tijuana indicated that the Operation Safe Crossing program reduced the number of late-night crossers by 31.6%. CONCLUSIONS: Effective use of data through media advocacy programs to support an enforcement effort can reduce alcohol-related crashes.

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