

PhD Research Proposal

Project Title: An evaluation of educational interventions for improving knowledge of coastal drowning prevention

Project Summary

This PhD project is a part of the ARC-funded study 'Science of the Surf (SOS): The Development and Evaluation of a National Campaign to Reduce the Risk of Coastal Drowning'. The incidence of coastal drowning will be estimated using current surveillance systems in NSW, including hospital inpatient and coroner's data. Surf lifesaving reports (if available) will be also scrutinised for drowning mechanisms. This data will be used in order to identify patterns of drowning and priority areas for intervention. Gaps in beach safety knowledge and the need for educational intervention will be identified using survey methodologies. For example, the SOS study demonstrated a lack of knowledge by beachgoers in identifying rip currents and dumping waves as key areas for further exploration. The PhD student will trial various educational approaches for improving coastal safety knowledge. Their effectiveness for improving coastal safety knowledge will also be assessed. The results of the project will provide critical knowledge regarding methods for improving coastal safety knowledge. The findings can be used as a template to guide further drowning prevention interventions using a range of media.

Aims of the Project:

- To develop and implement a range of educational intervention materials aimed at improving coastal safety knowledge;
- To evaluate the effectiveness of different types of educational interventions and media;
- To identify the most effective education intervention method for improving coastal safety knowledge

Significance of the Project:

- Determines the demographics, patterns and trends in coastal drowning;
- Provides a data-driven basis of drowning prevention priorities;
- Determines effectiveness of educational interventions for improving coastal safety knowledge;
- Provides beach safety practitioners in Australia with effective preventative countermeasure(s).

Research Plan:

Descriptive epidemiological study, including retrospective reviews of surveillance data to identify cases of coastal drowning:

- Hospitalisation inpatient records (HOIST) for cases of coastal drowning
- Surf Life Saving Australia drowning incidence records
- Coroner reports for deaths due to coastal drowning

Investigate coastal safety knowledge and identify gaps in current knowledge by survey of beachgoers:

- Questionnaire
- Telephone interviews
- Face-to-face interviews

Review educational interventions which aim to improve coastal safety knowledge:

- In Australia and overseas
- Current vs. historical campaigns
- Review any evidence of effectiveness

Develop educational interventions using various media to address current gaps in coastal safety knowledge (subject to funding):

- Poster
- Brochure
- Community seminars such as Rob Brander's "Science of the Surf"
- Public service announcement
- Youtube
- Television reality shows Bondi Rescue, Surf Patrol and Deadly Surf (Piha Rescue in NZ)

Measure the effectiveness of educational interventions:

- Conducted at coastal and non-coastal areas
- Targeting different age groups
- Male vs. female
- Domestic vs. international tourists

Approximate schedule:

July 08-Dec 09:	Student commences, review of literature and epidemiologic data
Jan 09-Nov 09:	Develop education intervention methods, piloting materials
Nov 09-Jan 10:	Implement interventions and assess effectiveness
Jan 10-Jul 10:	Data analysis, further refinement of interventions
Jul 10-Oct 10:	Target priority areas/ages with revised interventions
Nov 10-Jan 11:	Assess effectiveness of intervention materials and methods
Jan 11-June 11:	Data analysis, report writing, dissemination of results

Criteria:

The successful PhD candidate will have a graduate degree in Behavioural Science or Public Health. The project would also suit someone with a background in Health Promotion or Education. An interest in beach safety would also be beneficial as would experience conducting evaluation studies.

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