

Stand up for your ride

An effective Norwegian road safety program, implemented in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Since 2011 Si ifra!, a course that prevents dangerous driving under youngsters, is developed and executed by Bjørn Smith-Hald in Norway. Studies by SINTEF show very good results: changes have been made in a positive direction in behaviour and statistics.

The Regional Board of traffic safety of Friesland (ROF) asked VeiligheidNL to explore if Si ifra! is suitable for the Netherlands and specific Friesland. The exploration contained a comparison of road safety of young drivers; demography; school systems; existing programs in the Netherlands; and a focus group.

The results of the exploration were promising. Nowadays VeiligheidNL is collaborating with Bjørn Smith-Hald by implementing Si ifra! in the Netherlands under the title: Stand up for your ride.

Keywords

Novice drivers; behaviour change; education; effective

Si ifra!

In the Netherlands, particularly 18- to 24-year-olds have a high risk to get in a car accident. The high risk is often caused by – amongst others – a lack of sleep, alcohol use, distractions, or reckless driving. Changing behaviour among this group is challenging. In order to prevent these kind of accidents, Bjørn Smith-Hald and his team developed a program in Norway named ‘Si ifra!’ (which translates to ‘Speak up!’), in 2011. The program focuses on the responsibility of both the driver and passenger to get home safely. It consists of a 90-minute session for 30-60 students, which is guided by a session leader. During the session, different exercises are performed, including role playing, mini lectures, and discussions. The exercises focus on differences between male and female drivers, reckless driving, and the role of passengers (in speaking up). During the session, the participants are also informed on, for example, the importance of wearing seat belts and the dangers of getting distracted (by a telephone). It is important for the session leader to make sure the participants feel comfortable and safe during these exercises, as emotionally charged topics are discussed. For example, participants will be asked to share their own experiences with (fatal) road traffic accidents.

Feasibility

The Regional Board Traffic Safety of the Dutch province of Friesland asked VeiligheidNL to investigate whether Si ifra! could be offered in the Netherlands, as well. A feasibility study was performed, consisting of seven elements.

1. Translating Norwegian research reports

In Norway, two research reports about Si ifra! have been written. In 2007, Moe et al. showed that participating in Si ifra! positively changed road safety behaviour. Namely, passengers spoke up more

often to reckless drivers and drivers changed their driving for the better. In 2009, Moe et al. showed that the number of road traffic-related injuries decreased in the Norwegian region of Vestfold. This decrease could not be explained by road improvements. However, it could be explained by offering Si ifra! to schools in the region, as for instance seat belt use increased and drunk driving decreased. In order to use the research reports in the feasibility study, both reports were translated from Norwegian to Dutch.

2. Interview with Bjørn Smith-Hald

An interview was held with Bjørn Smith-Hald to get more detailed information about the program. Information was exchanged about the core values of the program, the methods that are used, the structure of the sessions, the implementation process in Norway, and the characteristics of the session leaders.

3. Comparing the baseline situation

In order to determine whether the positive results in Norway – in terms of road traffic-related injuries – could be duplicated in the Netherlands, baseline situations were compared (Palma & Olij, 2019). Based on data of SINTEF (1999-2003), the police (2017-2018) and emergency departments (2019), the number of severe road traffic-related injuries (per 10,000 inhabitants) among 18- to 24-year-olds were compared. In general, the number of injuries is quite comparable between the Norwegian region of Vestfold and the Dutch province of Friesland. Though, as different (incomplete) data sources were used, no reliable statements could be made.

4. Comparing demographics

Norwegian and Dutch national data sources were used to compare demographics (Palma & Olij, 2019). In general, the population composition is quite comparable between Norway and the Netherlands. For instance, in both countries, men are overrepresented among 18- to 24-year-olds. Population density differs between countries, as in Norway, it is 30 times lower than in the Netherlands. However, as the Dutch province of Friesland has a low population density (consisting of many rural areas), it compares quite well with the situation in Norway. In both situations, inhabitants generally depend on their own means of transportation (and they travel long distances), as public transportation is less often available. This could, for example, increase the risk of drunk driving in the weekends. Purchasing power among Norwegians is \$18,500 higher than among the Dutch, and unemployment among Norwegian adolescents is 2.6 percent lower than among Dutch adolescents.

5. Comparing education systems

During the interview with Bjørn Smith-Hald, it became clear that Norwegian municipalities commissioned them to offer Si ifra! at schools. Norwegian municipalities are (locally) responsible for the quality of the education, and they have a say in the school curriculum (Sirelo, n.d.). On the contrary, in the Netherlands, municipalities are 'only' responsible for housing schools. The individual school boards are responsible for the quality of the education provided. Also, the Dutch central government are (nationally) responsible for monitoring the quality of the education provided. The differences in the role of municipalities could affect the implementation of Si ifra! in the Netherlands. Instead of approaching municipalities, each independent school has to be approached. As road safety education is not mandatory in post-secondary vocational education or university (of applied sciences), schools have to get convinced the program has an added value for their students. Several teachers were interviewed about the implementation of Si ifra! in Dutch schools (Palma & Olij, 2019). They indicated that the program could fit well within specific (road safety) theme or introduction weeks.

6. Comparing existing road safety programs

In the Netherlands, there is a wide range of road safety programs available for adolescents. The technology platform for transport, infrastructure, and public space (CROW) bundles and scores Dutch road safety programs in the 'Toolkit Road Safety Education' (CROW, n.d.). CROW scores the programs based on several components, such as the underlying theory, and the effect and process evaluation of the program. A maximum of 50 stars can be scored by a program. In the current feasibility study, it was determined whether Si ifra! could be integrated with already existing road safety programs in the Netherlands (Palma & Olij, 2019). Programs with a minimum of 40 stars (including seven stars on the components effect and process evaluation) were included (n=14). None of these programs had the right tone of voice, had teachers with the right credentials, or reached the same target group.

7. Pilot

At the end of 2019, Bjørn and Gard Smith-Hald offered a Si ifra! session (in English) to a group of 42 students and three teachers at a university of applied sciences in the Dutch city of Leeuwarden. After the session, participants and teachers were asked to fill in a short questionnaire. On average, students were 19 years old (Palma & Olij, 2019). Of the students, 55 percent had a driver's license and 24 percent took driving lessons. The majority of the students believed that Si ifra! is useful (86%), that it will lead to less accidents (79%), and that they would recommend it to their peers (82%). Furthermore, about two-thirds of the students believed that they would speak up sooner to a reckless driver (69%) and that they would be more attentive to their passengers (67%). Forty-one percent of the students said that they would adjust their driving when a passenger would ask for it. Students indicated that they would pay more attention to wearing a seat belt, drive less aggressive, and speak up to reckless drivers. Students rated the Si ifra! session with a 8.2 (range: 5.5-10.0). All of the teachers believed that Si ifra! is useful, that it will lead to less accidents, and that it could be interesting for other students and teachers. Furthermore, they believed that students will speak up sooner to a reckless driver, and that students would be more attentive to their passengers. Teachers rated the Si ifra! session with a 8.7 (range: 8.0-9.0). The majority of the students (81%) and teachers (100%) believed that the best place to offer Si ifra! in the Netherlands is on the post-secondary vocational education and university (of applied sciences) level. Other possibilities are driving schools and sport clubs.

Implementation

The feasibility study showed that Si ifra! could be offered in the Netherlands. Therefore, the Regional Board Traffic Safety of the Dutch province of Friesland asked VeiligheidNL to implement the program in the Netherlands. Firstly, a new title for the program had to be created. The title needed to be appealing for the target group. Furthermore, it had to activate and empower drivers and passengers. In cooperation with a creative marketing agency, a new title for the program was created: 'Stand up for your ride'. Secondly, we had to look for Dutch session leaders. Together with Bjørn Smith-Hald, a job description was made. The job description was shared on several websites, to which many candidates responded. In the end, three candidates were chosen. They received a three-day training, that was provided by Bjørn and Gard Smith-Hald, in the Netherlands. When a new title was created and three Dutch session leaders were trained, several institutions were contacted about offering a Stand up for your ride session. This consisted of contacting post-secondary vocational education, universities (of applied sciences), driving schools, and sport clubs in four different Dutch provinces. Implementation of Stand up for your ride in the Netherlands (since 2022) has come with the following financial and practical challenges:

- Each of the 12 Dutch provinces has a unique approach on commissioning road safety education. Therefore, there is not one plan of action that works for everyone.

- Every school is responsible for their own curriculum. Neither post-secondary vocational education nor universities (of applied sciences) have an obligation to include road safety education in their curriculum. Therefore, each school has to be approached individually, and has to get convinced the program has an added value for their students. This is a very labour intensive process, as a simple email will not do the trick. A personal network consisting of the right contacts needs to be build, by (amongst others) multiple phone calls and online meetings.
- Even if an institution is willing to participate in a session, it is challenging to bring large groups of 18- to 24-year-olds (i.e. up to 60) together in one place.
- In general, students of post-secondary vocational education drive recklessly more often than students of universities (of applied sciences). Thus, Stand up for your ride could be particularly helpful for post-secondary vocational education students. Sessions that have been offered to this group showed that the students had difficulties with the amount of knowledge transfer and the length of the session. We are now exploring ways to shorten the sessions and to make the knowledge transfer more interactive. In addition, we are determining from what age we can best offer the session to the students, in order to get the most effect.
- The program is developed based on the differences in brain development between boys and girls. During the session, the different exercises that are performed showcase these differences. The current generation of 18- to 24-year-olds do not always see a world with differences in gender, and therefore could be offended by these exercises. We are exploring ways to adjust exercises to make it more gender neutral.

Future of Stand up for your ride in the Netherlands

Stand up for your ride is currently being offered in four different Dutch provinces. Three other provinces are interested in the program, as well. After implementing the program in the Netherlands in the beginning of 2022, it seems probable that the program will be offered to seven different Dutch provinces before the end of the year. This is quite unique for a road safety program in the Netherlands. Currently, an study on the program is being performed in the Netherlands. The study consists of an effect and process evaluation, among an intervention group and a control group. The intervention group (i.e. six groups of students) attends a Stand up for your ride session, whereas the control group (i.e. six groups of students) does not attend a session. Both groups receive a questionnaire at baseline and after 4 weeks, in order to determine the effect of the program. In addition, the process evaluation is being performed among the intervention group and (guest) teachers. CROW will score Stand up for your ride based on, amongst others, this study. When the program is part of the Toolkit Road Safety Education, it will be (even) more interesting for different institutions (such as schools wanting to include road safety education in their curriculum).

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