Highlights from the injury prevention literature

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This month, three journal issues are available online for free, each with articles of interest. World Medical & Health Policy includes a paper on how to improve emergency planning for frail and vulnerable people. Nearly half of those who died in Louisiana during Hurricane Katrina were older than 75 years.


During a 6 year period, Alaska Native people had a firearm injury death rate more than three times the US rate and more than four times for firearm suicides. This study interviewed 258 heads of households in ten Alaska Native villages. Firearms ownership and use.


Many Indian Health Service hospitals collect injury data from their emergency rooms. But does this give a complete picture of the injury problem? Researchers compared 3 months of IHS severe injury data with statewide hospital discharge and mortality data, filtered to identify only cases of injury to American Indians residing on reservations. There were 107 non-duplicated cases, almost evenly split between IHS and state datasets. More falls were identified by local data, while more suicides, motor vehicle crashes and other causes were identified in the state data.

The authors recommend using both data sources, while acknowledging that collecting IHS data is very labour intensive. A more efficient method would be for IHS hospitals to participate in statewide surveillance systems.


Risks of strangulation and suffocation deaths from crib, playpen and bassinet bedding are well known. For the first time, researchers examined nonfatal injuries, using a national dataset. Most injuries involved cribs, primarily due to falls (66% of injuries). Other injury mechanisms were being cut, hit or falling in the crib, and being caught or wedged. There was a high proportion (13%) of ‘other’ injuries. Although the rate of crib-related injuries decreased over time, the total number did not, averaging 26 children per day. Recent changes in crib manufacturing standards and increased consumer warnings and recalls hold out some hope of improving these numbers.


A large study of 757 patients who had been hospitalised for head injuries compared them with two case control groups: hospitalised with other forms of injury, and a community group. Both were matched to the head injury cohort for age and gender, and for duration of admission for the hospitalised group. At the end of 13 years, 40% of the head injury cohort had died, compared with 19% (community group) and 28% (other injury group). Older people died at a higher proportion in all groups, but there were higher death rates in younger adults after even mild head injury as well as more severe head injuries.

Further, younger adults appear to be at greater risk of death after a head injury, while the risk for older adults declines more than 1 year after injury. Deaths were due to a variety of causes (circulatory, respiratory, neoplasms). Death from self-harm did not differ between the groups but there were more deaths due to dementia and seizure disorders among the head injury group.


Communities often hope that media campaigns will be effective with target audiences. This article describes a meta-analysis of existing media campaign studies from 1998 through 2009. Only five studies were found on mental health, which showed little evidence of effectiveness in preventing suicide. Five studies on child maltreatment were inconclusive. Fifteen studies described traffic enforcement campaigns, eight described drunk driving campaigns, and 133 studies addressed other aspects of road safety (driving, road and vehicle design, seat belt use). These studies gave strong evidence that campaigns for seat belt use and against drunk driving are effective when combined with enforcement. Designated driver campaigns showed mixed conclusions. The authors conclude that although mass media campaigns can produce desired changes in population behaviour, success is much more likely when the target behaviour is episodic rather than ongoing. Multiple interventions and policies to reinforce change also increase the chances of success.


Another study postulated that risk-taking is glorified in the media to a greater extent in recent years and provides several examples. The authors summarise research on risk taking and the effects of media portrayals on this set of behaviours. They performed a meta-analysis of studies that examined risk-taking portrayals in media including behaviours such as risky driving. The study effect sizes totalled more than 80 000 participants. The authors confirmed earlier findings that risk-glorying media affect young people (< age 24) more detrimentally than adults, and found that video games and other active exposure produced the greatest effect on risk-taking. Street racing is identified as one behaviour that appears to be on the increase in several countries; video games, a popular cartoon, and advertising glorify this activity.


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