News from India and China

Morbidity and mortality due to injuries have been officially recognised as significant public health problems in the high income countries (HICs). However, this is not true for the low income countries (LICs). This lack of recognition is assumed by many to be because of an absence of data regarding injuries and because of the prevalence of a “fatalistic attitude” in the population of these countries. Both these assumptions are probably wrong. If you examine the content of newspapers in LICs, deaths due to injuries are clearly given a great deal of importance by the public and officials and these newspapers carry frequent editorials regarding the lack of safety in their respective roads and streets. These newspapers also report the concern that citizens show by demanding safer roads, schools, and homes. This concern is expressed in the form of letters to the editor, formation of community groups to tackle the problem, and pleas in response to tragic events. Some studies also report that poor people spend enormous amounts of money (as a proportion of their incomes) on the treatment of their injuries and other ailments.

This evidence clearly shows that injuries are recognised as a serious problem by society and that the citizens at large do not have a fatalistic attitude toward life. If they did, they would not end up spending so much to have their injuries treated. However, what is true is that LICs have not been able to institute effective programmes for injury control. This is largely because the problems in LICs are very complex and there is very little precedence for effective safety policies and interventions that suit low income societies. In addition, LICs also suffer from a lack of expertise and specialised institutions in the area of injury control. Unless local expertise is developed, promoting sustainable and effective injury programmes will be difficult. It appears that attempts are being made in some countries of Asia to move toward this goal of strengthening local expertise.

Mr Hua Yong Hong of the Traffic Management Research Institute of the People’s Republic of China organised a week long seminar on road traffic safety and congestion last October. The seminar was held in Hangzhou and attended by senior police officials representing the different provinces of China. The lecturers at the seminar included experts from China, Canada, the US, Sweden, and Japan. The police officers from different provinces made presentations on specific issues concerning traffic and congestion in their specific locations. With increases in motorisation, there are serious problems concerning pedestrians and cyclists of which a large number constitute children. The conflict between the need for providing facilities for faster motorised traffic and ensuring the safety of vulnerable road users became evident in the discussions. At present there are clearly no clear guidelines for the resolution of these problems except the control of vehicular speeds through traffic calming and police enforcement. However, much more work needs to be done to evolve location specific designs and policies.

An International Course on Injury Control and Safety Promotion was held in the first week of December in Delhi, India. The week long course was organised by the Transport Research and Injury Prevention Programme of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, in collaboration with Department of Public Health Sciences, Karolinska Institute, Sweden. The course was sponsored by SIDA, Sweden, and WHO and attended by 26 participants from 11 countries. The faculty included Leif Svanström, Ragnar Andersson, and Karen Leander from the Karolinska Institute, Dinesh Mohan, Geetam Tiwari, Mathew Varghese, Imam A Qadeer, and Rajesh Patel from IIT Delhi, and Larry Berger and Rick Smith from the USA.

A funny thing happened on the way to the meeting: on guns and triggers

Two women who were attending the 1997 American Public Health Association (APHA) annual meeting in Indianapolis were shot in a restaurant while waiting to be seated. A man with a registered .32 caliber handgun was leaning over to pick something up from the floor when a weapon fell out of his pocket, dropped on the floor, and fired two bullets. In the gun world, this is known as a drop-fire, a close kin to a bump-fire, both due to defective trigger mechanisms. When a child chokes on a small ball, for instance, a toy rocket, the regulatory machinery of government has no say. There have been serious problems concerning pedes- trians and bicyclists of which a large number constitute children. The conflict between the need for providing facilities for faster motorised traffic and ensuring the safety of vulnerable road users became evident in the discussions. At present there are clearly no clear guidelines for the resolution of these problems except the control of vehicular speeds through traffic calming and police enforcement. However, much more work needs to be done to evolve location specific designs and policies.

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Young indigenous males are more than twice as likely to die from injury as their non-indigenous counterparts.

**Influences on injury risk**

The report notes that raised injury patterns and services can provide a wide spectrum of causes and that the dominant cause of unintentional injury death, motor vehicle crashes, have been the subject of extensive intervention, but that other causes are not documented well and associated with limited injury prevention activity.

The link between injury and lifestyle/behaviour and exposure to hazardous environments is reflected in the literature. A common theory is that a lack of protection of precocies such as thrill seeking, poor risk perception, risky cultural norms, inexperience, stress, and alcohol consumption is known about but untangling how they operate together has not yet been done. Similarly it is known that there is an association between injury and socioeconomic and education disadvantage, but the details of how and why are unclear.

**Strategies**

The report analyses a range of interventions at the broad and the particular level that have been used to address injury.

There is strong supportive evidence for the effectiveness of certain personal protective equipment in reducing injuries including seatbelts, motorcycle helmets, bicycle helmets, and eye protectors in squash. There are many strategies found to offer promise but for which current evidence is inadequate.

**Conclusions**

The report identifies a range of interventions that can be put in place, research and evaluation that needs to be undertaken, key policy and structural issues requiring attention, and the need for further development of prevention oriented surveillance of injury.

It is noted that important questions of how to address the issue of injury among young males remain to be answered and the need to work systematically to deal with research, implementation, and decision making infrastructure is stressed.

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**Youth suicide in New Zealand**

There has been considerable concern in New Zealand in recent times over a jump in the suicide rate for young people in the 15–24 age group. The 1995 figure of 156 deaths represented a rise over the 137 in 1994, which itself was up on the stable figures (125 to 130 per year) of the preceding years. The rise in suicides was the subject of much public discussion and lead to the formation of Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy, the introduction of a new mental health awareness curriculum in schools.

In the past the law has limited publication to name, address, and occupation. Since 1996 coroners have had discretion over the details permitted to be published concerning suicide, but this power is rarely used. Following a number of suicides some coroners have suggested that the practice should change because the right of the public to know and the usefulness of research outweigh the right of the grieving family to privacy.

**Safe medicines campaign in Glasgow**

Greater Glasgow Health Board, the statutory organisation responsible for commissioning health services in Scotland's largest city, became increasingly uneasy in 1997 at the rising tide of hospital admissions of children who had ingested medicines. In response, they launched an end of the year awareness raising campaign in conjunction with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. The initiative aimed to focus on dangers to children, particularly those under 5, of accidental poisoning and to promote the safe storage of medicines at home. A key message was that all children, regardless of social background, are potentially at risk. A packed press conference in November heard the head pharmacist of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Yorkhill, sheepishly confess that his own pre-school child had found and swallowed some paracetamol tablets!

The campaign received widespread exposure in the local media, though its impact on the incidence of ingestions remains to be assessed. Health promotion and public relations experts drew their background information from a number of sources including the recently launched countrywide CHIRPP (Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program) initiative aimed to focus on the dangers to children, particularly those under 5, of accidental poisoning and to promote the safe storage of medicines at home. A key message was that all children, regardless of social background, are potentially at risk. A packed press conference in November heard the head pharmacist of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Yorkhill, sheepishly confess that his own pre-school child had found and swallowed some paracetamol tablets!

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**Southern Africa report**

One aspect of paediatric trauma medicine that really appealed to me when I entered this field just over 10 years ago, was the challenge of non-operative management of blunt injuries. Like most colleagues, I certainly have no deep aversion to the blood spattered, adrenalin rich milieu of emergency surgery, but when working in adult trauma units, I had found the endless routine of operating on victims of gunshot and knife attacks both predictable and depressing. At Red Cross Children’s Hospital, my happy experience has been to deal mostly with blunt injuries, usually the result of falls or traffic collisions, and where clinical diagnostic ability and the art of multidisciplinary management are more important than speed of surgical interventions. In the past weeks and in spite of government efforts to control handgun ownership (as outlined in my last report), I have had no choice but to dust off my scalpel, don the bloodproof apparel known as “universal precautions”, and spend long hours in the operating room repairing the ugly damage caused by flying bullets—always uglier when it lacerates the flesh of young children.

Preparation for this summer holiday season, I have restocked my unit with large bore chest drain catheters, high flow intravenous infusion sets, instrument packs for resuscitative thoracotomy, and an autotransfusion device—administered by trained doctors. These initiatives still struggle to make an impression on the old ones.

The official South African figures for road traffic injury in 1997 are horrifying: 517 669 collisions, 22 757 serious injuries, 4 016 deaths. Against this doom and gloom, the “Arrive Alive” traffic safety campaign launched throughout South Africa two months ago looks to be the best means of business. In the course of regular weekend “blitzes” in the Western Cape alone, 87 000 motorists have been fined for a variety of misdemeanours, and the number fined for driving under the influence of alcohol (total 8 887) has dropped dramatically. Although 9508 fines were handed out in the same period for failure to wear seatbelts, there has not been a single conviction for failure to restrain children, most likely because South African laws governing use of child restraints are too anaemic to be worth enforcing.

CAPFFSA hopes to make a worthwhile contribution to child passenger safety in 1998 by launching a long overdue child restraint loan scheme based in Cape Town. In the meantime, all children, regardless of social background, are potentially at risk. A packed press conference in November heard the head pharmacist of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Yorkhill, sheepishly confess that his own pre-school child had found and swallowed some paracetamol tablets!
Sally Flocks reported on a 4-year-old killed on an Atlanta residential street. The child was struck by a police officer speeding at 45 mph for no apparent reason. (The officer has been charged with vehicular homicide.) Two years ago, the neighborhood requested traffic calming for that particular street but the city turned them down. Curiously, the mayor said at the funeral “in many ways, this is the worst kind of tragedy, because we have no one to be angry with.” Sally said that before the mayor’s response, she had two places to target her anger, but now she has three. Mike Mott suggested a fourth target for Sally’s anger—“NHTSA, that spends millions to protect those inside a vehicle and nothing to protect those outside the vehicle.”

While that comment may be a slight exaggeration, the US government policy toward child pedestrian injuries appears to focus on altering the child’s behavior. PEDNETers pointed out that in the recent edition of Transactions of the Childern’s Department of Transport, Sally’s father said he taught his child about pedestrian safety.


This book challenges the widely held views in road safety that young children are biologically incapable of coping with the road environment, until an appropriate stage of psychological development is reached. It thus provides an informative framework for a debate on the aims and objectives of road safety education and usefully contributes to the debate on the relative role of education, engineering, and urban planning methods in injury prevention.

The report was commissioned by the Department of Transport from a team of developmental psychologists at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland. The first author, James Thomson has been actively involved in the development and evaluation of both experimental and operational road safety programmes, but the report runs considerably wider than the authors’ own programmes.

The book comprises five main sections: (1) aims and objectives of road safety education, (2) current methods employed in road safety education, (3) theories relating to child development, (4) implications of these theories for training, and (5) conclusions and recommendations. A clear and concise executive summary is provided and valuable useful summary sections for each chapter. The bibliography of 220 references draws widely from the field of development psychology. One criticism here is that more attention is given to the road safety literature from Europe than from the USA or Australia. The report, however, usefully summarises the developmental psychologist perspective on this issue, is (thankfully) free from jargon, and very clearly written. It provides a body of work and careful argument.

The aims and objectives of current road safety education are explored in chapter 1. What emerges is the lack of concrete objectives in most programmes. Even when more precise objectives are defined, the majority are concerned with knowledge and attitude change, rather than behaviour. As there are no direct links between knowledge change and behaviour, the validity of road safety education can be questioned. The authors go on to analyse different components of the complex pedestrian task: detecting the presence of traffic, making visual timing and spatial judgments, coordinating different information from different directions, and coordinating perception and action. They discuss how such skills develop in children and the level of skills that can be expected in children of different ages. They cite convincing evidence that children’s performance on a range of clearly defined pedestrian skills can be accelerated, providing appropriate training is given.

The issue of appropriate training is examined in chapter 2. A useful distinction is made between the content of a programme and the methods employed: programmes can fail if the content is inappropriate and/or if the methods are inappropriate. What methods have been used in this field? Classroom based verbal methods, books and printed materials, films and videos, and practical training are all analysed. An interesting observation is that video techniques can offer greater flexibility than films, particularly if they are tailored to children’s own locality and incorporate children as subjects. The feedback capabilities of such local videos may be worth exploring further. But the report particularly favours the use of practical skills training, involving

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Fatal and non-fatal farm injuries

Eston,—In a recent issue of Injury Prevention, in an article on fatal and non-fatal farm injuries, the organization Farm Safety 4 Just Kids is mentioned as an example of a grassroots group working on children’s farm safety. Dr Rivara is a fine researcher, and has worked with Farm Safety 4 Just Kids on other analyses, and we are glad that you published his article.

The board of directors of Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, however, asks to be placed on record with your journal to explain the last phrase in paragraph 2 of the introduction: “Grassroots groups, such as Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, have been formed to increase public awareness of the magnitude of the problem, conduct public education, and lobby for legislation and regulation”. Lobbying for legislation and regulation is an activity that, while not prohibited by our non-profit 501 c 3 status, has not been a major component of our work. The Farm Safety 4 Just Kids board of directors has been sensitive to the variety of mixed reactions and opinions there are to such activities as legislation and regulation by an organization that is working directly with farm families.

Thank you for allowing us to further explain our organization in addition to the information included by Dr Rivara.

MARTHA S CLINE
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BOOK REVIEWS

Injury Prevention 1998;4:79

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Inj Prev: first published as 10.1136/ip.4.1.77 on 1 March 1998. Downloaded from http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/ on September 14, 2023 by guest. Protected by copyright.
active behavioural participation and their arguments is convincing.

“Skiing or swimming, driving or learning to ride a bike all require practical experience: no-one has ever learned to do these things just sitting at a desk. Yet this is precisely how we expect young children to cross the road” (p 59).

Chapter 3 provides the theoretical underpinning of why practical skills training is effective, concentrating in particular on the theories of J J Gibson, Jean Piaget, and L S Vygotsky. Skills and strategies cannot be taught solely by verbal means but need to be built up from their constituent behaviours. There is strong evidence that learning is more flexible than earlier theory supposed, particularly when appropriate interventions are employed and the authors conclude that appropriate training could begin as early as 4 years of age.

The implications of child development theory for training are discussed in chapter 4, with peer tutoring, adult led training, and peer collaboration being considered. The first two of these methods stem from a Vygotskian approach and are likely to be best suited to the learning of skills and strategies. Peer collaboration, on the other hand, is more in line with Piagetian theory and would appear to be more useful in the provision of conceptual understanding. The authors believe that successful training needs to include both approaches.

The final chapter summarises the context of the report and produces a range of recommendations for both practical training and for future research.

One reservation about the report is that it is not overly systematic: it does not set out its criteria for the way its evidence was obtained nor its inclusion criteria for how studies were selected. Is there a literature that does not support the conclusions, which has not been cited. It would have been useful to have had the study findings summarised in accompanying tables.

Childhood injury prevention requires input from a wide range of disciplines and this contribution from the developmental psychology field is a useful addition to the literature, particular learning of skills and strategies. Peer collaboration, on the other hand, is more in line with Piagetian theory and would appear to be more useful in the provision of conceptual understanding. The authors believe that successful training needs to include both approaches.

Reducing Firearm Injury and Death: A Public Health Sourcebook on Guns. By Trudy A Karlson and Stephen W Hargarten remedy this gap in the public health literature.

After a brief chapter summarizing the scope of the firearm injury problem, the book’s strongest chapters follow. In clear language, without jargon, the authors explain the historical development of firearms and ammunition, the different types of modern firearms, and how differences in design affect the likelihood or severity of injury. One secondary insight from these chapters is just how pervasive firearms are in the culture and language of the US. Ubiquitous phrases like “flash in the pan”, “half cocked”, and “hair trigger” all derive from the design or function of firearms.

Especially valuable are the book’s frequent sidebars explaining the “Public health implication” of a particular aspect of firearm design or operation. These sections speak directly to public health practitioners, providing a clearer connection between the knowledge and information being conveyed and opportunities for prevention. A remarkably prescient example is the authors’ suggestion that, given some firearm’s unfortunate propensity for firing when dropped, perhaps only those guns that can pass a “drop test” should be eligible to be carried concealed. Had the state of Indiana accepted this suggestion, perhaps two women attending the November 1997 Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association in Indianapolis might have been spared needless injury. In other areas, where adequate data are not yet available, the authors effectively explain what questions about the contribution of gun design to death and injury we could answer with better surveillance systems.

Chapters that follow, describing “Where guns come from” and “How guns are operated”, are somewhat less effective. Although the overviews these chapters provide can be useful, this vast territory not always well served by superficial treatment. The authors are conscious of this limitation, however, and also refer readers to other, more detailed sources. These chapters are also less valuable for non-US readers. While the basics of gun design and operation do not change from country to country, injury data, gun policy, and opportunities for prevention can be quite different.

The book concludes with a chapter explicitly devoted to strategies for prevention. Consistent with the authors’ product modification focus, these strategies build on the information provided in the book’s early discussion. The relative political feasibility of implementing these strategies, however, is not carefully considered. And those interested in reducing firearm injuries through behavioral strategies or improvements in treatment should look elsewhere.

Preventing firearm death (and injuries is a tremendously contentious subject, at least in the US. While other countries, such as Great Britain and Australia, have recently sought to address their own firearm injury problem by banning certain guns, this is not currently feasible in the US. Reducing Firearm Injury and Death persuasively demonstrates that interventions targeted at the gun itself, even without eliminating guns altogether, also merit our attention. Opponents of such efforts often argue that injury control practitioners do not even understand the product they seek to regulate. And while I do not think that it is possible to completely control the manufacture of guns, it is not necessarily the case that we can not only “arm” ourselves with the information to rebuff this assertion, but will be better equipped to craft new approaches.

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It may appear odd for an editor to review a book with this title. But after reading it I was convinced it was appropriate for me to do so and I have even resolved to review in a later issue a companion text, How to Write a Paper. One justification for urging you to read this book is that knowing what others look for when reading a paper should have a strong influence on what you do, if and when you decide to write a paper. And we, like all other journalists, are in a constant quest for more and better papers.

I confess that the subtitle “The basics of evidence based medicine” almost put me off. I’m one of those who, as David Weatherall describes in the foreword, is a “slightly uneasy by the concept”. I bristle at the phrase because it suggests that those of use who work in areas not dominated by randomized trials are “fearful”. But the author, Trisha Greenhalgh assures me that much of the hype about “evidence based medicine” (EBM) is packaging. Indeed, if the basic skills involved in EBM boil down to “assessing the scientific validity and practical relevance of papers articles found in the medical literature”, then I have no quarrel. This is what I trust our reviewers do, what our authors try to do, and what our readers should do.

Having said that, we can always use help, and this book is abundantly helpful. Although its core is a synthesis of elements found in most introductory epidemiological or biostatistical texts, it is far from “just another book”. It is impossible to imagine even the most sophisticated scientist not benefiting from a thorough read.

I was especially impressed with the chapter entitled “Getting your bearings (what is this paper about)”. This includes a box entitled “Common reasons why papers are rejected for publication” that is so on-target that I urge authors preparing papers for Injury Prevention (or any other journal) to place a photocopy of this box over their desk and read it daily. The rest of this chapter reviews basic research designs, explains them clearly, creates a “hierarchy of evidence”. Chapter 4 moves on to the heart of the discussion “Evaluating methodologic quality”. This includes a sensible discussion of critically important questions about the most revealing element of any paper—its Methods section. The chapter entitled “Statistics for the non-statistician” is nearly balanced: not too little that it might do a disservice to the value of well chosen, well executed statistical tests, and too much, such that it could add to the fear of readers who consider themselves...
CALENDAR


11–13 August 1998. 1st International Conference on Children’s Health and Environment, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Further details:

The International Society for Child and Adolescent Injury Prevention (ISCAIP)

ISCAIP invites you to attend a one day conference, the 3rd ISCAIP Conference on Childhood Injury following the 4th International Conference on Injury Prevention and Control:

RAI Conference Centre, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Thursday, 21 May 1998, 9:30 am–5:00 pm

The program will focus attention on childhood injury in Europe, child occupant protection, and making regulation work. In addition, a debate on intentional injury and ISCAIP is scheduled for the final plenary. We are also offering the opportunity for registrants to submit commentaries to be included in the conference discussions.

Attendance fee: £55 ISCAIP members; £75 non-ISCAIP members

If you would like to receive further information and a registration form, please fax or e-mail Angela Seay, ISCAIP Administrator, c/o CAPT, 18–20 Farrington Lane, London EC1R 3AU, UK (fax: +44 171 608 3674, e-mail: ASEAY@compuserve.com).

Conference Secretariat ICCHE ’98, c/o VVAA Conference Services, PO Box 8153, 3503 BD Utrecht, The Netherlands (fax: +31 30 247 4647, e-mail: congress@vvaa.nl).


6–13 December 1998. International Course on Prevention and Control of Road Traffic Accidents and Injuries, New Delhi, India. The course is being organised by Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi and INRETS, France. Further details: Coordinator, Transportation and Road Injury Prevention Programme, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi 110016, India (fax: +91 11 685 8703, e-mail: mahesh@chme.irdternet.in).


12–16 April 1999. XVth World Congress on Occupational Safety and Health, São Paulo, Brazil. Further details: XV Congresso Mundial Sobre Segurança e Saúde no Trabalho, Fundacento, Rua Capote Valente 710, 05409–002-São Paulo, Brazil.

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