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Wider factors affecting health and wellbeing

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Accidents

Headlines

Accidental injury is one of the main causes of death for children aged 1-15 years and is closely linked to deprivation.

Home remains the most common site for accidents, particularly for young children and older people.

Local road traffic casualties were at their lowest level ever in 2009, although there had been an increase over the last three years in the numbers of children aged under five years injured or killed on the roads of Kirklees.

Alcohol and/or use of illegal substances was often linked to accidents, especially road traffic accidents amongst young adults (16-29 year olds).

Falls are a major cause of illness and disability amongst those aged over 65 years, and 1 in 3 experiences one or more falls in a year.

Why is this issue important?

Injury or death because of an accident can be prevented if a sensible reduction in risk is taken. Approximately half of accidents happen at home, which is the most common setting for accidental injuries in all ages, particularly those aged 0-4 years.

In England and Wales in 2008, 131 children aged under 16 years died in road accidents and 208 children aged under 15 years died as the result of injury or poisoning¹.

In 2009, Kirklees recorded its lowest ever road traffic casualty figures: 22 people were killed, 138 people were seriously injured and another 1,538 were slightly injured. One in 3 of all people killed and seriously injured were aged under 19 years².

There were more than 1,000 road traffic accidents in 2009 in Kirklees; they resulted in 13 fatal or serious casualties and 147 slight casualties amongst people aged 65 years or over. Most of these accidents occurred in the population dense areas of Kirklees such as town centres or along main roads.

What significant factors are affecting this issue?

There are significant inequalities in death and injury from accidents^{3 (p45)}, for example, children of parents who have never worked, or who have been unemployed for a long time, are 13 times more likely to die from unintentional injury than children of parents in higher managerial and professional occupations⁴.

Speeding traffic was the greatest contributory factor to accident frequency and severity, followed by parking⁵. Children in the 10% most deprived areas of the UK were five times more likely to die as a pedestrian than children in less deprived areas, partly because they have fewer safe places to play and may walk more as their parents do not own a car⁶.

Lack of mobility and taking multiple medications are significant risk factors for falls, the risk of both increases with age¹¹. When people become less mobile, bone density thins and weakens so fractures are more likely.

Alcohol use and/or use of illegal substances was often linked to accidents, leading to many injuries and deaths⁷. Almost 1 in 4 (22%) of those killed in road traffic accidents in the UK have illegal drugs in their bloodstream. Alcohol is the single biggest cause of accidents in the home⁸.

Which groups are affected most by this issue?

Children

In the past three years, 14% more children aged 0-4 years were injured on the roads in Kirklees than previously, but the numbers were very low².

Children aged under five years are most likely to have unintentional accidents in the home and immediate area. From the age of about seven, children have more accidents when out than at home – reflecting where they spend the majority of their leisure time⁴. In 2009, 166 children aged 5-15 years were injured on the roads in Kirklees².

Accidents in the home include burns or scalds, with hot drinks being the most frequent cause of injuries. However, house fires cause the most accidental deaths of children in the home, most because of smoke inhalation. In 2009, there were 262 dwelling fires with three deaths in Kirklees⁹.

Young people

Alcohol related accidents (including drink driving) are the leading cause of death for 16–24 year olds. Young drivers aged 17-19 years are 10 times more likely to have a drink drive crash compared to drivers of all ages^{10 (p28)}. During 2009, 16-29 year olds accounted for 39% of all casualties on the roads in Kirklees, despite being only 19% of the local population.

Older people

Musculoskeletal conditions, including osteoporosis, bone fragility, fractures, and falls, account for more than 60% of longstanding illnesses in people aged over 65 years. Each year, 35% of people aged over 65 years and 45% of people aged over 85 years experience one or more falls^{10 (p33)}. However, older people often will not admit to others they have fallen on occasions. Falling and the fear of falling can make older people lose confidence in carrying out their normal activities. Falling in older age can lead to increased anxiety and depression, reduced activity, mobility and social contact, higher use of medication and greater dependence on medical and social services and other forms of care¹².

Nationally, people aged 75 years and over have a death rate of 114 per 100,000 caused by accidents compared with a death rate of 21 per 100,000 in all age groups¹¹. The main cause of fatal accidents for those aged 65–74 are falls, traffic related accidents and fires.

Men aged 65 years and over were more likely to be involved in road traffic accidents as passengers and car drivers whereas women were more likely to be involved in road traffic accidents as car and bus passengers².

Where is this causing greatest concern?

For adults the areas of Huddersfield, Mirfield, and Denby Dale & Kirkburton had the highest number of road traffic accidents. However, residents were more likely to be injured in Dewsbury and Mirfield or Batley, Birstall & Birkenshaw. These areas are in the top 20 postcodes in West Yorkshire for uninsured vehicles, young driver casualties and children being injured as pedestrians, car passengers and cyclists¹². These areas also have a high degree of non-compliance in seat belt usage.

Views of local people

Issues identified in 2010 by the Kirklees Accident Prevention Forum, a multi-agency strategic group include:

- The primary cause of accidents for the 16-25 age group is road related, mainly from sending texts from mobile phones whilst driving, speeding and not using seatbelts.
- There has been an increase in unlicensed and uninsured drivers in the north of Kirklees.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the increased use of off road bikes is adding to accident rates.
- Accident and emergency departments see more people during bank holiday evenings whose accident is linked to alcohol.
- The fire and rescue service carried out a project outside two schools in Dewsbury and saw many children in cars without car seats or restraints.
- Increase in burn injuries from use of hair straighteners.
- Fire setting – in wheelie bins pushed up to doorways.

What could commissioners and service planners consider?

- Continue to develop a more co-ordinated safety enforcement, promotion and education programme across key agencies (NHS, local authority, police and fire services) and client groups concerned, especially children, young people and older people.
- Continue implementation of government actions to reduce childhood deaths and injuries in the Staying Safe Action Plan¹³.
- Develop further and differentiated opportunities to deliver safety training through the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) framework for school age children.
- Maintain and intensify the focus on safety in the home and fire safety (both of which have particular significance for young children) and safety on the roads (especially for secondary school aged children and young adults).
- Continue targeted support for disadvantaged families through the home safety equipment scheme, which provides information and support to make homes safer environments.
- Increased focus on reducing the risk factors for falls amongst older people, including using a range of data sources to identify those most at risk.
- Injury prevention should be better integrated into health professional education curricula¹⁴.
- Significant gaps in local and national data collection need to be addressed to improve understanding of the size and severity of unintentional injury.
- Build stronger relationships with local people to help raise awareness of key local injury related problems and target common issues.

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