



DATA DRIVES POLICY

DuValle Education Center - Ujima Safe Community A Component of the Office of Child Advocacy Kosair Children's Hospital Louisville, Kentucky

Data Is What We Do

"I'm a nurse, not an epidemiologist, so I was intimidated by having to get everyone else's data and trying to make sense of it. I had experience examining data from the hospital, but I was worried that examining police and court data would be something entirely different. With a lot of help from our community groups, we did it. Now, I'm a believer. Data really can make a difference," says Erica Kravic, coordinator of the Ujima Safe Community Program. "The community's data on seat belts and motor vehicle injuries helped us to learn more about our problems and change the way we do things. Our data analysis will reduce injuries."



Every injury practitioner knows the value of data. Data collection and data analysis are critical steps that we must take to develop injury programs. We need injury data to help us identify risk factors and target groups, to identify injury problems, and to evaluate the effect of our interventions. Injury data are most often used to help us design and implement injury prevention program. Few of us, however, get the opportunity to use data to actually influence policy.

Collaborative Data Effort

Last summer the numerous community groups collaborated with county government of Jefferson County to publish a chart book showing various population, health, economic, and social indicators for communities and neighborhoods in Jefferson County, including Louisville, Kentucky. The Community Profile of Jefferson County, Kentucky galvanized various communities to learn even more about their health problems and to do something about them. One of them was Ujima.

Ujima is part of Louisville, and is one of the city's poorest communities. Two-thirds of the children under five are below the poverty level, mean household income is slightly half of the county average, and crime rates are high. Although 35% of households are without a car, motor vehicle death rates are double that seen in the rest of Jefferson County.

To address some of Ujima's injury

problems, the Neighborhood Place - a one-stop social services center, the DuValle Education Center - a school-based community center, and Louisville's Kosair Children's Hospital - the city's only children's hospital - joined together to organize a safe community.

Kosair Children's Hospital and SafeKids had been working in the Ujima community on other social services projects, and because of this already established relationship, it was possible to move quickly in setting up injury prevention activities.



Targeting Efforts

One of the coalition's first tasks was to learn more about specific injuries in Ujima. One concern was the low usage of child restraints and seat belts. Data were collected from hospitals and emergency departments for further analysis; eventually they would be used to design interventions. During one of the community coalition meetings, a traffic police officer observed that the statewide seat belt law was not making much of a difference in preventing traffic injuries. Few citations were being written, and the law was not being supported in the court.

Few Citations Written

Letters were written to the courts to learn more about the number of citations written for violation of the seat belt law. Kentucky has a seat belt law that applies to adults (and children over 40 inches), that

carries a \$50.00 fine, but it can only be enforced secondary to some other violation. For children under 40 inches, however, it is a primary law, meaning an officer can stop a car if a child is not in a restraint seat and there is no other traffic violation present. Data came back revealing the police officer was right - in a county with a population greater than 600,000, only 82 citations for not wearing a seat belt were written during all of 1996. Of these, 51 were dismissed, 2 were pending, and only 19 were convicted.

Police Opinion

The next step was to talk with police officers and learn more about why citations weren't being written. The coalition found several reasons. First, police thought that anything having to do with restraints was a secondary violation, i.e., another violation needed to be present in order to stop a vehicle. Second, many of the officers thought they could only write a citation for no child restraint if the child's parent was the owner and driver of the car (note: this was true in a previous version of Kentucky's law). Third, police officers were required to complete a separate citation for each violation. That means if a driver is stopped for speeding and the driver is not wearing a seat belt, the officer must write complete two *separate* citation documents for the two violations.

Changing Procedures

The Safe Community group decided to address the problem by asking the chief judge for the county to permit multiple violations be written on the same citation page. Not only was the judge supportive of this, but he had already begun an inquiry of his own. As of August 1997, this issue has been resolved. Up to four

violations can be written on one citation page.

In-service education

Next, the group met with police officers during their annual training seminar to explain the somewhat confusing details of Kentucky's seat belt laws. To date, the safe community groups has met with most divisions and zones of the Jefferson County and Louisville police.

"We are waiting for official citation data from the courts," said Ms. Kravic, who is also a Child Advocate at Kosair Children's Hospital, "but based on anecdotal reports, the police have a better understanding of the laws. We believe that this will improve their enforcement efforts, resulting in more citations, and ultimately fewer injuries. Data and a collaborative community relationship have really helped us find a solution to this problem."

Quick Reference Tool

During the training sessions, the police requested a quick reference to Kentucky's motor vehicle code. With this reference, the job of correctly writing citations can be made easier. The Safe Community project, working with the police, is preparing a laminated one page reference that will be distributed in February, 1998 to the police.

seat belt violation citations - is all that is needed to bring about important policy changes that will in turn reduce injuries.

For more information:

Erika G. Kravic, RN
Office of Child Advocacy
Kosair Children's Hospital
PO Box 35070
Louisville, KY 40232-5070
Tel:502-629-7335
Fax:502-629-7331



Editor's note: Sometimes a simple data analysis - in this case examining the number of

Reports were developed under cooperative agreement between NHTSA Region IV and Emory University Center for Injury Control