



SCSN Briefing Paper No 08 – Unintentional Injuries in the Home

1 Introduction

The purpose of this Briefing Paper is to identify the key causes of unintentional injuries which occur within the home environment and to highlight key statistics, trends and emerging issues. This paper does not cover information on fire safety as this is an extremely large topic and will be covered in a separate Briefing Paper.

Unintentional injuries are one of the most common causes of emergency hospital admissions in both children and adults. In 2010/11 58,307 of admissions were as a result of unintentional injuries, 28% of which occurred in the home. It has been seen that there has been a gradual reduction of serious injuries from home incidents, with a 14.3% reduction between 2000 and 2010.

It is preferred that the term ‘unintentional injury’ is used instead of ‘accident’ as there is a feeling that accident suggests that the event was inevitable, however, it is regarded that the majority of incidents can be prevented. Within the home, there are numerous ways in which an unintentional injury can occur. The most common are recognised to be:

- Falls i.e. trips and slips, wet floors, inappropriate footwear, stairs.
- Burns & scalds i.e. cooking incidents, baths, hot drinks.
- Choking, suffocation and drowning i.e. choking on food, nappy sacs, cots with bumpers and pillows, blind cords, ponds.
- Poisoning i.e. accidental overdoses, ingestion of chemicals and cleaning products, poisonous plants.
- Crushing i.e. heavy objects falling or pulled down such as TVs.

For purposes of this paper, the home can be defined as *“any type of house, block of flats or caravan together with its garden, yard, driveway, path, steps and boundaries”*.¹ This also includes other people’s homes.

2 Current Status

The figures included in this paper are derived from the Information Services Division (ISD) 2011 unintentional injuries report² and the Home Safety Scotland 2010 report³. It should be noted that figures only relate to hospital admissions and do not take account of injuries treated at home, by a GP or in accident and emergency. RoSPA have estimated that in Scotland, around 1,000 people may be seeking medical treatment each day due to an unintentional injury caused in the home.

Principal Causes

The table below is derived from the Home Safety Scotland 2010 report which breaks down the principal causes of serious incidents in the home which resulted in

¹ Home Accident Surveillance System (HASS)

² ISD Scotland, Publication Report, Unintentional Injuries, Published December 2011 - <http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Emergency-Care/Publications/2011-12-20/2011-12-20-UI-Report.pdf?50660341979>

³ Home Safe Home: Report on Home Accidents in Scotland, Home Safety Scotland, December 2010 - <http://www.instituteofhomesafety.com/articles/HomeAccidentsScotland.pdf>

emergency hospital admission in 2009/10. It can clearly be seen that falls are the major cause of unintentional injuries in the home.

Cause of Injury	Number of injuries in 2009/2010	Percentage
Falls	11,647	72.0
Exposure to inanimate mechanical forces	1,704	10.5
Poisoning	943	5.8
Other	627	3.9
Burns and scalds	437	2.7
Accidental exposure to other and unspecified causes	390	2.4
Exposure to animate mechanical forces	176	1.1
Overexertion, travel and privation	116	0.7
No RTA transport accidents	77	0.5
Choking	55	0.3
Drowning/submersion	7	0.0
Total	16,179	99.9

Costs

Unintentional injuries are a major contributor of ill health and disability which in turn creates considerable cost to the NHS, the individuals and their families and society as a whole. The Re-valuation of Home Accidents Report 2010⁴ report estimates that home injuries cost Scotland £4 Billion with home fatalities costing a further £350 million, The average costs of injuries and fatalities in the home are estimated to be:

- Fatality - £1,611,400
- Serious injury - £ 45,600
- Sight injury - £ 8,300
- Average of all non-fatal injuries - £ 16,900

Children

Unintentional injuries happening in the home are very common in children, primarily due to the amount of time they spend in the home environment. The ISD report states that 1 in 19 of all emergency hospital admissions for children is a result of an unintentional injury in the home. These figures only relate to hospital admissions and there will be many incidents where the severity of the injury will only require simple first aid. It is seen that the one to four age group accounts for half of the admissions and it is thought that one of the reasons for this is due to this age group not perceiving danger as well as older children.

Adults

ISD data shows that in 2010/11, over a quarter of the emergency hospital admissions of adults were as a result of unintentional injuries in the home. The over 75 age group is seen to have the highest number of admissions due to unintentional injuries in the home (53.2%), with the major cause being falls.

⁴ Transport Research Laboratory, Publish Project Report PPR483: Re-valuation of Home Accidents, 2010

Gender

It has been found that of the children in the one to four age group, males had 40% more hospital admissions due to incidents in the home than females. This continues into the five to nine and the ten to 14 age groups, where males are still more likely to be admitted.

In adults, it is seen again that males are more likely to be admitted to hospital from unintentional injury than females. However, this pattern changes in the 75+ age group as more females are noted to be admitted. It is thought that this occurs due to females generally living longer than males.

Vulnerable Groups and the Deprivation Gap

The Scottish Government has identified that “unintentional injury disproportionately affects the most vulnerable groups in society - notably children, older people and those living in areas of deprivation”⁵. The ISD report also identifies a link between socio-economic deprivation and the risk of unintentional injury. In adults, death from an unintentional injury are higher in the most deprived areas and for children in deprived areas death rates are double those found in more affluent areas.

3 Emerging Home Safety Issues

New technologies, gadgets and products are constantly being introduced to the home environment and as such new risks emerge. One example of this is hair straighteners. In recent years hair straighteners have become commonplace throughout homes and there has been a rise in the number of adults and children who have received burns from the appliances. A second example is the trend for installing large trampolines in home gardens. In 2011, approximately 42 % of children injured using play equipment was as a result of trampoline injuries at home.⁶

With the invention of new technologies and new trends, there will always be new risks emerging in the home, therefore it is important that people are aware of the risks and that community safety practitioners keep abreast of new and emerging issues.

4 Key Considerations

The key to reducing unintentional injuries in the home is to highlight the risks to the public with the aim of preventing incidents from occurring. However, there is a requirement for up to date data to allow for the targeting of work. One current barrier to this is the lack of detailed information relating to injuries in the home. Although details are published regarding how many injuries and deaths were caused by home incidents, this only relates to hospital admissions and it does not give information on GP and accident and emergency treatments. As such, the overview of the issue is extremely broad and far reaching.

The sharing of good practice is an ideal way of reducing unintentional injuries in the home. The European Child Safety Alliance has developed a Child Safety Good Practice Guide⁷, which provides an overview of key injury prevention practices for children, although a number of them can be extended to include adults. The use of

⁵Scottish Government Website, accessed January 2012 - <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice/public-safety/17141/homesafety>

⁶ROSPA Website, accessed January 2012 - <http://www.rospa.com/homesafety/aroundtheuk/scotland/trampoline-safety.aspx>

⁷European Child Safety Alliance Website, accessed February 2012- <http://www.childsafetyeurope.org/publications/goodpracticeguide/>

evaluation and evidence is paramount in developing quality initiatives, however, in Scotland there is a lack of evaluation carried out on local initiatives and as such the sharing of good practice is limited. SCSN produce Practice Notes with the aim of promoting good practice. There is currently one Practice Note (Fife Cares⁸) which tackles home safety, however, new Practice Notes are in development.

It has been discovered that more people are drinking at home rather than in pubs and restaurants, some of the reasons for this may be the current financial climate and/or the smoking ban. It has been recognised that there need for research to be carried out to determine the link between alcohol and injuries caused in the home and to date this has not been undertaken in Scotland (with the exception of fire incidents).

It is seen that there is a great difference in the way the public perceive risk and risks in the home do not feature highly on their radar. As such, RoSPA is currently campaigning to get home safety the same recognition as road safety and would like to see it being taught as part of the school curriculum.

5 Key Questions

This section of the Briefing Paper poses some questions in relation to unintentional injuries in the home and asks the reader to discuss these with fellow practitioners to raise awareness.

- How can the provision of injury data be continued and enhanced?
- How can the importance of initiative evaluation and good practice be highlighted?
- How can the profile of home safety be raised to help reduce the numbers of deaths and injuries in Scotland?
- Should there be a national strategy for Home Safety in Scotland?
- Should Scotland develop its own home injury prevention policies?
- How can the home safety message be enhanced to the public and within the education system?

6 Links

Below are links to injury related website which may be of further use:

- Injury Observatory for Britain and Ireland (IOBI) - www.injuryobservatory.net
- EuroSafe - www.eurosafe.eu.com
- Information Service Division (ISD) Scotland - www.isdscotland.org
- World Health Organisation (WHO) - www.who.int/en
- Home Safety Scotland - www.homesafetyscotland.org.uk
- Royal Society of the Prevention of Accidents (Scotland)- <http://www.rospa.com/about/aroundtheuk/scotland>

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⁸ <http://www.safercommunitiesscotland.org/Documents/PN15%20-%20Fife%20Cares.pdf>