

GUIDELINES FOR THE DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION OF EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS ON VIOLENCE AND INJURIES

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Foreword

The commitment of the health sector, and of the Pan American Health Organization in particular, to the study and prevention of intentional and unintentional injuries demands better and clearer working tools for use by the different sectors with which it interacts in this common effort. The focus on prevention of violence and unintentional injuries is directly correlated with the information that is available on their magnitude, their pattern over time, the circumstances in which they occur, and, especially, the people they affect.

Repeatedly, and with reason, governmental authorities, nongovernmental organizations, the academic sector, the communications media, and voices from the communities have insisted on the need to have good and reliable information, not only on events that result in injuries or deaths or that threaten the psychological or sexual integrity of persons, but also on their causes and the circumstances in which such acts occur. This demand has been accompanied by a growing, although still insufficient, number of studies and models for data collection that are being developed in different countries of the Americas. These are laudable efforts that provide a basis for further learning and development of ideas.

Based on these experiences and on a review of literature on the subject, the Program on Non-Communicable Diseases of the Division of Disease Prevention and Control is pleased to present this document to serve as guidelines for the various interested parties. PAHO proposes to apply the approach and methods of public health work, in coordination with other sectors, to help reduce and prevent violence and injuries.

Epidemiological surveillance systems or public health surveillance systems, when properly implemented, have been shown to effectively remedy information gaps. Information on the circumstances, characteristics, time patterns, and related factors concerning violent acts or unintentional injuries can help generate ideas, proposals, and, ultimately, preventive interventions that make it possible to reduce, control, and if possible eliminate the occurrence of injuries.

Given the characteristics and magnitude of violence as a social and public health problem, it is clear that its study and prevention requires a joint effort, coordinated by authorities at the national or municipal level. Accordingly, we propose the formation of interdisciplinary teams or working groups that can work together and complement each other in order to generate useful information. This is not intended to create bureaucratic entities, but rather to combine efforts that are now scattered, with the goal of preventing acts of violence or unintentional injuries.

The proposals offered by this document are guidelines; they are not prescriptions or finished formulas. However, they are based on processes that have been shown to be valid for documenting cases of violence or accidents. The theoretical section on the concept and principles or attributes of epidemiological or public health surveillance, taken from texts on the subject, concentrates on aspects related to intentional and unintentional injuries. Use of the International Classification of Diseases is also proposed as a method for registry of cases that facilitates international comparison.

We are pleased to disseminate this working tool intended for broad use by professionals, technicians, and practitioners: in short, by all those from various disciplines and institutions who are dedicated to initiatives to prevent injuries. Comments and criticisms for the purpose of improving the content will be welcome.

SYLVIA ROBLES

Coordinator

Program on Non-Communicable Diseases

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World Health Organization