

3.2 Accidents and Injuries and Supportive Environments

Accidents and Injuries

There is currently limited standardised data collection system for accident and injuries locally. Various accident and injury related data is held at the Department for Health Information and Research in hospital based information systems and through the occupational health and safety authority reporting systems. Recently improved and more detailed information on traffic related accidents and related injuries are being collated by the Police in collaboration with the Malta Transport Authority and the National Statistics Office.

Reporting year	No of traffic accidents	Fatalities
2004	15643	13
2005	15584	16
2006	15549	10
2007	16138	14
2008	15007	15

Between 2004 and 2007 there were 33 work-related deaths. In 2007 there were 4328 reported accidents at work (3829 in males and 499 in females). The main economic activities associated with occupational accidents in males are the manufacturing (34.8% in 2007) and construction industries (17.9% in 2007).

A pilot study of data gathering by the Department of Health Information and Research at the Emergency and Admitting department in Gozo General Hospital and selected health centres around the islands to monitor all accidents, including domestic and leisure-based accidents was started in 2004. The collection of related demographic data and details on mechanism of injury, activity or product involved and related data has recently increased the quality of local information on childhood injuries. Similar data is collected by the Health and Safety Unit regarding accidents occurring in schools.

Results for a complete year of reporting in 2005 showed that of 1,643 accidents and injuries seen at Gozo General Hospital, 239 occurred in children aged 0-18 years. Of these 69% (298) occurred in males, and 31% (131) in females. Most unintentional injuries occurred in the home, and twice as commonly in boys (13.5% of girls and 29% of boys injured). Schools (for 5.8% of girls and 10% of boys injured) and transport areas (4% of girls and 10% of boys injured) were the next most common places of accidents. Blunt force was the most common method of injury in 23% of girls and 47% of boys injured in this study¹⁰.

In 2007, out of 1785 persons seen at Gozo General Hospital Emergency Department 477 (159 girls and 318 boys) were children. Raw data for all persons presenting to the A&E Department at Mater Dei Hospital is being collected by the Department of Health Information and Research. So far this work is being done manually, however software to decipher accidents will soon be acquired.

The Health and Safety Unit within the Directorate for Educational Services is aiming at taking a leading role in the way Health and Safety related messages are disseminated amongst young people. This Unit has a rolling program where a number of specially appointed peripatetic teachers deliver an educational program to all primary school children, covering topics including home safety, safety at sea, internet safety, electricity, fire and road safety. A similar program is carried out in secondary schools, this time covered by specially appointed in-house Health and Safety teachers. Awareness raising and informative sessions on the same topics are also carried out with parents, for example, parents are made more aware of the hazards they may have at home, how to identify them and subsequently reduce or eliminate them. The Unit is also actively engaged in providing Professional Staff Development sessions where teaching staff as well as minor staff members are trained in hazard awareness and child-injury prevention.

¹⁰Department of Health Information, Ministry of Health, the Elderly & Community Care, 2007



Apart of these educational roles, these teachers also see to the safety of pupils during schools hours. School risk assessments are regularly carried out so that any hazardous materials or activities are identified and actions to counter them can be taken.

The recently published WHO European report on child injury prevention, 2008¹¹, states that most child injuries can be prevented by a shift from focusing on changing

individual behaviour towards the provision of safe environments. This acceptance of a collective societal responsibility in preventing injuries has resulted in sustained reductions in fatalities, and reduced health inequalities in a number of countries adopting this approach.

Supportive Environments

A safe, clean and healthy environment in which our children live, learn and play is fundamental to their health and well being and development. In order for children to fully enjoy their right to play, as well as to a healthy lifestyle, it is necessary for them to have access to safe spaces which facilitate a physically active lifestyle. Urban and spatial planning that promotes increased physical activity in safe and supportive environments will help reduce cardio vascular and other diseases for which obesity in childhood, also resulting from reduced physical activity due to lack of such environments is a risk factor.

The alarmingly high incidence of obesity in Maltese children, almost the highest in the world as confirmed by several studies (IOTF data, 1992; Gauden et al , 1992); HBSC study 2005-6); Grech V, Farrugia Sant'Angelo V 2007), is an area of great concern even amongst the younger age groups. The existence of policies to reduce

¹¹ http://www.euro.who.int/violenceinjury/injuries/20081205_11

childhood obesity has been identified as an ENHIS¹² (Environment and Health Information System) indicator, under Regional Priority Goal II of the CEHAPE.

A study on obesity in 34 countries carried out in 2005 by Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario¹³ revealed that the highest prevalence of overweight youth was found in Malta (25.4%), followed by the US (25.1%) and Wales (21.1%). In the same year, the European Federation of the Associations of Dieticians also noted that 30% of children in Malta aged 7 to 11 are obese.

Physical inactivity and very busy school curricula with little time for recreation and play are areas that have been identified in a national attempt to counteract obesity. In 2006, research showed that whilst playing fields are available in many localities, little use was made of them by children¹⁴.



As of January 2008, the Healthy Eating and Lifestyle Plan (HELP)¹⁵ came into force, for due implementation by schools in Malta and Gozo. The main goals of this plan are “to ensure that Maltese schools deliver a holistic education; to make provision for the setting up of the necessary frameworks, resources and support needed by Maltese schools to help students adopt healthier patterns of living.”

¹² <http://www.enhis.org>

¹³ Janssen I, Katzmarzyk PT, Boyce WF, Vereecken C, Mulvihill C, Roberts C, Currie C, Pickett W. Comparison of overweight and obesity prevalence in school-aged youth from 34 countries and their relationships with physical activity and dietary patterns. *Obes Rev.* 2005;6:123-132

¹⁴ Sollars, V. *Children's Right to Play: a study of Maltese Children's Perceptions on cultural and recreational activities*, Office of the Commissioner for Children, 2006

¹⁵ *Healthy Eating and Lifestyle Plan*, Education Division, 2007

The creation of opportunities to promote increased physical activity in children and adolescents, such as the recent *KMS Girls on the Move*¹⁶ initiative by the Kunsill Malti Għall-iSport is encouraged.

The Children's Manifesto by the Office of the Commissioner for Children, which reflects the situation at the time of publication in February 2008, also identified the provision of safe environments where children can play and participate in outdoor activities identified as a priority. It states that "Efforts enabling children to enjoy their right to open spaces are currently underway, in developing more child-friendly open spaces in both urban and rural areas. This work should be further developed, increasing access to the countryside. This could partly be achieved through walking paths that link urban and rural areas when this is ecologically sound."

¹⁶ <http://www.sportmalta.org.mt/>(accessed 19 Nov 2008)