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Title

Policy analysis of the Safe Community Program in injury prevention in Iran

By

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Injuries and accidents are among the leading preventable causes of death and non-fatal health outcomes associated with disability in many countries, including Iran. One notable initiative aimed at enhancing community safety is the Safe Community program. This study aimed to conduct a retrospective policy analysis of the Safe Community program in order to support policymakers in enhancing and potentially reforming the program in Iran.

Methods: This research employed a mixed-methods design within the framework of concurrent transformative studies and a policy analysis approach. The study was conducted in three phases: systematic review, qualitative analysis, and quantitative evaluation. In the first phase, a systematic review of academic databases and grey literature was conducted to identify key attributes of Safe Community programs. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured individual interviews and document review, utilizing the Health Policy Triangle and 3i frameworks. The quantitative phase focused on cost-effectiveness analysis and the program's impact on reducing injuries and fatalities. Two cities were selected: Zarand (intervention site) and Ravar (non-intervention site). To evaluate effectiveness, the Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALY) index was estimated. Logistic regression was used to analyze program impact, and cost estimation was based on data extracted from organizational financial records.

Results: The systematic review identified 46 relevant studies. While core components of the Safe Community program were similar across implementing settings, local adaptations had been made based on community-specific contexts. In the qualitative phase, findings were categorized into four domains based on the Health Policy Triangle: context, content, process, and actors. Key contextual factors included situational and structural issues. In Iran, the high burden of injuries and the need for an integrated safety policy framed the problem stream. Political support, leveraging existing local structures, and fostering a societal perspective contributed to the policy stream. The political stream was shaped by actor interactions and leadership transitions. Ultimately, the convergence of problem, policy, and political streams—facilitated by policy entrepreneurs from the health sector and Tehran Municipality—opened a policy window for the Safe Community program to emerge on the national agenda. However, the policy analysis indicated that intersectoral collaboration, stakeholder participation, and leveraging local and institutional capacities are essential for enhancing safety and reducing injuries. Precise planning, continuous monitoring, and transparency in inter-organizational relationships were identified as key success factors.

Management challenges, such as data system limitations, inter-organizational conflicts of interest, symbolic political gestures, and the absence of an effective coalition, emerged as major barriers to implementation. The lack of policy institutionalization, limited stakeholder engagement, and insufficient political and financial commitment ultimately led to program discontinuation. Program evaluation was fragmented and constrained due to weak systems and data deficiencies. Ambiguous goals, insufficient funding, and lack of clear governance mechanisms contributed to structural weaknesses. The program's stewards were unable to balance stakeholder interests due to unclear responsibilities and the absence of supportive mechanisms.

Quantitative findings indicated that, in 2021, Zarand reported 5,944 accidents and 49 deaths, whereas Ravar had 495 accidents and 7 deaths. The DALY index was lower in Zarand than in Ravar, suggesting a limited but positive effect of the program. The electricity authority accounted for the largest share of safety-related expenditures.

Conclusion: This study examined structural, content-related, implementation, and stakeholder challenges of the Safe Community program to guide policymakers. Structural fragility in program stewardship—manifested in data management shortcomings, weak intersectoral cooperation, limited stakeholder involvement, conflicting interests, funding deficiencies, and inadequate evaluation and oversight—undermined the ability of policymakers to revise and strategically manage the program. Consequently, the initiative became fragmented and lacked formal integration within the broader health policy landscape. For injury prevention in Iran, critical factors include sustained financial resources, enhanced injury surveillance systems, and active community engagement. Empowering residents through awareness campaigns and education fosters sustainable safety improvements. In sum, while the Safe Community program represents a promising approach to injury prevention, addressing the identified challenges—particularly through evidence-informed policy and stakeholder collaboration—can help strengthen the program and create safer environments while reducing the national injury burden.

Keywords: Safe Community Program, Policy Analysis, Health Policy Triangle, Injury Prevention, Safety Promotion, Iran