

Our Shrinking Globe

Implications for Child Unintentional Injuries



Olakunle Alonge, MBBS, MPH, PhD^{a,*}, Uzma R. Khan, MBBS, MSc^b,
Adnan A. Hyder, MD, MPH, PhD^a

KEYWORDS

- Unintentional injuries • Children • Low- and middle-income countries
- Road transport injuries • Globalization

KEY POINTS

- Unintentional injuries are a major global health problem resulting in high morbidity and mortality among children of all ages.
- The burden of preventable childhood unintentional injuries is disproportionately borne by low- and middle-income countries (LMIC).
- Drowning and road transport injuries account for most unintentional injuries deaths for children.
- Globalization creates inequalities in the distribution of economic gains, risks, and opportunities for preventing child unintentional injuries between high-income countries and LMIC.
- Key strategies for injury prevention in LMIC in a globalized economy include advocacy, extending complex international laws that protect free market to ensure and enforce safety standards, improved surveillance, human resource capacity building, and further research on evidence-based interventions.
- Pediatricians should include unintentional injury prevention counseling as part of routine anticipatory guidance for infants, children, and adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Unintentional injuries are a leading cause of death for children of all ages. Globally, they accounted for 15.4% of about 2.6 million deaths recorded among children aged 1 to 14 years in 2013.¹ Although proportionate child mortality due to unintentional

^a International Injury Research Unit, Department of International Health, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, 615 N Wolfe Street E8622, Baltimore, MD 21205, USA; ^b Department of Emergency Medicine, Aga Khan University, Stadium Road, Karachi 74800, Pakistan

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: oolongel1@jhu.edu

injuries is higher among high-income countries (HIC), the absolute count of death and mortalities due to unintentional injuries are higher in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC).² Hence, unintentional injuries kill more children and at a faster rate in LMIC relative to HIC. The term unintentional injuries in this context is defined as injury or poisoning that is not inflicted by deliberate means,² whereas injury itself is defined as “the physical damage that results when a human body is suddenly subjected to energy in amounts that exceed the threshold of physiologic tolerance—or else the result of a lack of one or more vital elements, such as oxygen.”³

The risks of unintentional injuries among children are mainly defined by individual factors (behaviors and attributes), presence or absence of supervision and safety equipment, vehicle safety, as well as other factors within a child’s social and physical environment.⁴ These additional factors are not static and change over time because of multiple reasons. Globalization, defined as “a process of greater integration within the world economy through movements of goods and services, capital, technology and (to a lesser extent) labor, which lead increasingly to economic decisions being influenced by global conditions,”⁵ cause significant environmental and behavioral changes among populations.⁶ These changes have implications for the distribution of risk factors and preventative strategies for child unintentional injuries especially in LMIC.⁴

The goal of this article is to highlight the implications of globalization for child unintentional injury causation and prevention in LMIC. First, the article describes the burden of child unintentional injuries using the most recent global burden of disease data, highlighting the countries with the highest death count and mortalities due to child unintentional injuries in 2013. Second, the article describes the risk factors and preventative strategies for the leading injury mechanisms of child unintentional injury deaths. Third, the article presents a framework showing key manifestations of globalization and describes the positive and negative consequences of these features on the risk factors and prevention of child unintentional injuries in LMIC. Finally, the article suggests pathways for harnessing the positive consequences of globalization in reducing the burden of child unintentional injuries in LMIC.

GLOBAL BURDEN OF CHILD UNINTENTIONAL INJURIES

Using the 2013 global burden of disease data,¹ the absolute death count and mortality for unintentional injuries^a among children aged 1 to 14 years^b were estimated and ranked for all countries (**Table 1**).^{2,7} The 12 countries in **Table 1** account for 58% of the estimated 406,442 deaths due to unintentional injuries recorded among children aged 1 to 14 years globally in 2013. It is important to note that of these 12 countries, 8 are middle-income economies,⁸ 2 (Equatorial Guinea and Russian Federation) are HIC, and 2 (Bangladesh and Afghanistan) are low-income economies. India has the highest absolute death count of 74,612, whereas Equatorial Guinea with 86.9 deaths

^a Unintentional injuries include injury from the following mechanisms: road transport injury (pedestrian road injury, bicycle road injury, 2-wheel road injury, 4-wheel road injury, other road injury); other transport injury; falls; drowning; fire/burns; poisonings; exposure to firearm (accidental discharge); exposure to other mechanical forces (sharp objects, machine); adverse medical treatment (injuries from error in medical and surgical procedures).²

^b Children are typically defined as individuals less than 18 years of age. However, because most global burden of disease data lumps individuals within ages 15 and 18 years into older age groups, the authors decided to restrict the analysis to those less than 15 years. Also, the proportionate mortality due to injuries among children 0 to 11 months is less than 2.5%.² Hence, this age group was also excluded from the analysis.

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