



The role of NGOs in child injury prevention: An organizational assessment of one network of NGOs



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ABSTRACT

Unintentional injuries are estimated to claim the lives of more than 875,000 children each year; millions more live with long-term consequences and permanent disabilities. The epidemiology of injuries has become clearer in the past decade. NGOs need to work in concert with each other to address the global burden of injuries by sharing information. Several NGOs have heeded this call, and the field has seen the emergence of global organizations aimed at highlighting the burden of injuries and streamlining injury prevention activities worldwide. Safe Kids Worldwide Inc. (SKWW) is a global network in 16 countries whose mission is to address the burden of injuries in children under 15 by harnessing the potential of local NGOs. An organizational assessment was conducted of SKWW which included structured organizational assessment, functional organizational mapping and contextual analysis that allowed for an in-depth examination of the strengths and challenges of SKWW's injury prevention approach. Over one year, primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed from headquarters and individual country offices. SKWW appears to be an effective model and has experienced a strong momentum and growth over the last two decades. Global NGOs that address the burden of injuries should start by defining a clear and universal strategic goal, build on local successes, maximize their strengths, and create avenues for stronger country engagement.

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1. Introduction

Unintentional injuries are estimated to claim the lives of more than 875,000 children each year; millions more live with long-term consequences and permanent disabilities due to injuries [1–3]. It is also estimated that injuries are responsible for about 12% of the current burden of disease worldwide, and that by the year 2020, this proportion will be as high as 20% [1,2,4,5]. It is believed that almost 80% of this burden lies in low- and middle-income developing countries, where the victims have very little or no

access to health care services [1,2,6]. In addition to the health burden, injuries also carry an enormous economic burden; road traffic injuries alone, for example, have been estimated to drain developing economies of as much as 1–2% of their gross domestic product (about \$100 billion) each year [7].

The epidemiology of injuries has become increasingly clearer in the past decade. However, effectively addressing this global health burden has remained a challenge, despite the attempts by several organizations worldwide—governmental, private and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to focus on injury prevention activities either wholly or as part of their other programs [8,6]. Most of the NGO entities work at the local level, independently trying to raise awareness to injuries as a public

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health problem or implementing interventions to alleviate the burden in their communities. This results in small side programs that may not have national impact. There is a need for a coherent and integrated approach by NGOs to work in concert with each other to address the global burden of injuries by sharing information [9–12].

Several NGOs have heeded this call, and the field has seen the emergence of global organizations aimed at highlighting the burden of injuries and streamlining injury prevention activities worldwide. Some organizations focus on post-crash responses, advocating for improved emergency services while other organizations focus on specific factors such as seat-belts or helmets while others focus on broader issues of sustainable mobility [13]. In 2011, over 140 members NGOs in more than 90 countries formed the global alliance of NGOs for road safety in order to “share best practices and collectively advocate for road safety and rights for victims of road traffic injury” [17].

In this article we take a closer look at one such network of NGO's through a case study approach. We conducted a structured organizational assessment that allowed for an in-depth examination of the strengths and challenges of an injury prevention approach of one NGO network with members in 16 countries as well as the identification of key factors that would be important to address. The ultimate goal of this exploration was to assist the NGO network with the on-going development and monitoring of its international offices and to conduct a systematic organizational assessment over a period of 12 months. The details in the case study are *examples* of the existing practices at this particular NGO at the time of this study, but the lessons learned may be relevant for many. The case study highlights practices that could be applied to global NGO networks with member organizations, with a focus on funding, communication structures, comprehensive goals and evaluation systems.

2. Case study approach

Safe Kids Worldwide Inc. (SKWW) is a global network whose mission is to address the burden of injuries in children under the age of 15 [14]. The network has tried to harness the potential of local NGOs around the world in an attempt to develop an integrated global approach to child injury prevention. The global entity, along with its member organizations in several countries have successfully advocated for increased awareness of child injury and have contributed to reductions in child injury through the implementation of innovative campaigns and programs [14]. The network has grown from a grassroots movement to become an international network that reaches tens of thousands of people each year with its programs and activities. Today, the SKWW has become recognized as a major player in the field of child injury prevention and is widely supported by the communities it works in. Even in a challenging environment where child injuries are often not high on the priorities of policy makers and funding agencies [15,16], SKWW member organizations have continued to thrive and grow. SKWW currently has offices or affiliations with local NGOs in 16 countries.

We conducted an organizational assessment of SKWW in 2009–2010 in three parts: Structural organizational assessment; functional organizational mapping; and contextual analysis. Structural organizational assessment involved the evaluation of people, infrastructure, and processes in place at different SKWW offices worldwide; to assess/understand a sense of the management and decision models in place. Functional organizational mapping was done through the identification of the organization's mission, vision, goals, and objectives; and understanding the relationship between goals and objectives in relation to the finances, perspective of the population served, and internal growth. In the contextual analysis, an assessment of the national, local and institutional context within which the SKWW office is operating in different countries was conducted; exploring relationships with economic development, legal status, and socio-political constraints.

Over a period of one year (2009), collection and analysis of both primary and secondary data was carried out at two levels—Safe Kids Worldwide Inc., and at the individual country level. The first step in the process was an on-line organizational survey, which utilized the online surveying tool *SurveyMonkey*[®], and targeted SKWW member country offices. The respondents to the survey were Safe Kids country representatives and program managers (we did not ask their specific roles in survey for confidentiality reasons) from 15 different offices. The survey asked a broad set of 71 questions covering seven domains that included organizational structure and governance in 2007 (including year of establishment, annual budget for SKWW activities etc.); planning and development; human resources; injury prevention activities; evaluation; branding and image; and context.

Following an initial analysis of the survey, one member of the study team conducted in-depth interviews with 6 country directors of SKWW member countries. These interviews provided an opportunity to explore at a greater depth issues relating to leadership, branding, networking, as well as challenges and successes of the organizations. The interviews were generally 30–60 min long, and followed a semi-structured guide.

All member country offices of SKWW were required to submit reports of the status of their organizations and activities to the headquarters in Washington D.C. SKWW made these reports available to the study team for review. In addition to these reports, the team also performed a document and website review of materials produced by Safe Kids Worldwide Inc and member organizations. These materials included any program specific brochures or pamphlets, and reports produced by member organizations. These documents were analyzed for on-going injury prevention interventions, program target population, program risk areas, in-country partners, advocacy measures and type of data collected by and available to organizations.

One of the dimensions for this organizational analysis was to assess whether the areas of focus for child injury prevention activities by member organizations was compatible with the burden of injuries in their respective regions. Also of interest was to document if SKWW injury prevention activities complemented or duplicated other activities going on in member countries. This specific

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