Road User Safety and Disadvantage

Abstract

It has been shown that there is a relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and the risk of being killed or injured on the road. Children and young people from disadvantaged areas are at greater risk, particularly when walking, compared with those from relatively affluent areas. This research involved a detailed exploration of the populations, environment, behaviour and attitudes in disadvantaged communities, looking for key areas of commonality. It also explored road safety provision for disadvantaged communities, whether inequality is recognised and addressed and the extent to which agencies work in partnership. The investigation provided lessons for road safety delivery, focusing on environmental and engineering solutions.

Main findings

- Children and young people in disadvantaged communities appear to be at greater risk of road injury because they live in more hazardous environments with high density housing, close proximity to high volumes of traffic and high levels of on-street parking. They also have lifestyles with higher levels of exposure to traffic risk, as they are more likely to walk and have less access to safe play spaces and supervised facilities. This means that there are fewer alternatives to the street as a place to socialise and play outside the home. They also live in environments with greater levels of hazardous and illegal driving behaviour, with an absence of consistent, visible enforcement.

- It was evident that there were many initiatives in place that potentially reduce the risk of road injury in disadvantaged communities, including engineering treatments, enforcement initiatives for offences such as non-seat-belt wearing or illegal parking, and direct provision or subsidy of equipment such as car seats where it may be unaffordable. Provision was sometimes universal and area-wide, targeted at hot spots with a history of collisions or motoring offences, or targeted at vulnerable groups.

- The research identified some key elements for effective partnership working on road safety issues. These included: building road safety into strategic-level planning; sharing data to guide planning; ensuring partnerships have real clarity of purpose; leadership and championing across organisational boundaries; effectively identifying and utilising partner roles and skills; making sustained provision for joint funded posts; and developing good relationships between local partners (including professionals and local people).

- Environmental and planning issues need to be given considerable emphasis as part of road safety strategies to address injury inequalities. The knowledge, insight and expertise of people within local communities should be at the heart of such strategies, including, for example, local traffic management and engineering schemes.

Background

The link between injury from road accidents and disadvantage is well established. What is less clear is **why** the risk of road injury is more pronounced for disadvantaged groups. The research consisted of three main phases:

- a development phase involving analysis of injury and spatial deprivation data, a review of existing evidence, interviews with (road) safety experts and government representatives from other policy areas;

- a core phase consisting of five detailed case studies in wards in Wigan, Bradford, Newham, Sunderland and Wolverhampton; and

- a follow-up phase designed to fill information gaps arising from the previous stages of the study.

Research findings

Factors associated with high levels of risk

The research indicated that the factors relating to the likelihood of people from disadvantaged areas being involved in road traffic incidents were related to them:

- living in more hazardous environments such as older-style developments, with dense housing and proximity to high volumes of fast-moving traffic and high levels of on-street parking;

- having lifestyles with higher levels of exposure to road traffic risk, such as being more likely to walk and less likely to be able to afford access to a car; and

- not having access to safe spaces and supervised facilities for children and young people, meaning that there are few alternatives to roads as places to socialise and play outside the home.

However, it was also apparent in local areas which had neglected and/or vandalised buildings and high rates of criminality and anti-social behaviour, wider concerns about personal safety often had an impact on the extent to which awareness of risks relating to road safety was acted on.

Residents were also concerned that high levels of hazardous and illegal driving behaviour pose a particular risk. This included:

- ad hoc and dangerous parking, speeding and aggressive driving;

- low levels of seat-belt wearing (particularly in the rear of cars); and

- a lack of use of child restraints or booster seats.

Another important aspect was the impact of a lack of consistent visible enforcement of the 'rules of the road' and the negative impact of this on driver behaviours.

Although there were some specific issues that warrant additional and/or more specific focus in disadvantaged areas, this research found that some environmental issues identified in the disadvantaged areas with high casualty rates, such as major arterial roads, heavy traffic and parking problems, were also applicable to more affluent areas. Many behavioural issues were also similar across areas, especially poor driving. However, the research found that people living in disadvantaged areas also had to contend with unsafe and run-down environments on a daily basis, while local children had fewer safe places to play in than children living in more affluent areas.

Road safety provision and practice

The risk factors identified by local road safety professionals were generally very similar to those identified in the community research. They were clearly reflected in the comprehensive range of initiatives that were in place. These included:

- children's road safety education and training to promote safe behaviour and crossing;

- publicity and communication activities to raise awareness and promote safe behaviours, road safety design and engineering;

- enforcement activity to tackle motoring offences;

- diversionary activities for young people; and

- measures to address crime and anti-social behaviour.

Children's road safety education and training interventions were generally made available to all, rather than being focused on disadvantaged communities. Other interventions such as engineering measures and enforcement activity were typically targeted at 'hot spots' with known histories of collisions or offences. Some measures were aimed at specific target groups, particularly children and young people, through interventions such as car-seat provision and diversionary activities for young people.

Examples of the types of interventions in place in disadvantaged areas that focus on the key environmental risks were: road safety engineering

schemes in all areas at sites where collisions have previously occurred, as well as route actions, area-wide traffic-calming measures and local engineering treatments in response to local concerns, although the latter were relatively rare. There were also examples of improvements to parks and open spaces involving refurbishment and new play facilities to provide safe places to play, as well as street improvements including the provision of street furniture, lighting and landscaping to enhance the environment and improve pedestrian safety. In one area a social housing provider had a policy to provide two parking spaces per dwelling in new-build developments to avoid the need for on-street parking where there is a risk to children.

Other examples of interventions representing a relevant and appropriate response to some of the identified risky behaviours were enforcement operations by the police, sometimes in partnership with others, targeted at specific areas and motoring offences, including speeding and non-seat-belt wearing. Interventions involving child car-seat provision, including car-seat hire, subsidy and car seats for maternity ward taxis, also appeared relevant and appropriate to the identified problems.

The monitoring and evaluation of road safety interventions was often limited, or absent, because of limited resources and a lack of knowledge and skills. In addition, it is difficult to identify significant changes in casualty levels at a very local level, and causality is often difficult to establish. The mixed picture in respect of monitoring and evaluation made it difficult for local professionals to determine the effectiveness of interventions and initiatives, and for the wider road safety community (including the Department for Transport) to identify and share good practice. The Neighbourhood Road Safety Initiative (NRSI) is a notable exception that has been subject to full evaluation and sharing of information on good practice.

There were many different types of partnership working to improve road safety, including local-authority-level road safety forums and strategic road safety partnerships. As such, local partnerships varied in how they operated because each one has a slightly different focus. At a minimum, they operated as a forum for a lead partner to provide local organisations and community groups with information about initiatives and interventions, as well as to be questioned about implementation and progress. At another level, they provided a forum for a much

more inclusive multi-directional exchange of information, knowledge and expertise. The success of partnerships was often a result of the extent to which a local 'champion' took interest in the road safety issues and promoted them at a strategic planning level and brought other organisations on side.

Some key elements for effective partnership working on road safety issues emerged. These included:

- building road safety into strategic-level planning;
- sharing data to guide planning;
- ensuring that partnerships have real clarity of purpose;
- leadership and championing across organisational boundaries;
- effectively identifying and utilising partner roles and skills;
- making sustained provision for joint-funded posts; and
- developing good relationships between local partners (including professionals and local people).

The research also found that the ongoing meaningful involvement of the local community would be more effective in delivering interventions that recognise the problems faced by local people and meeting their needs, including, for example, local traffic management and engineering schemes.

Conclusions

The overarching finding from this research is that environmental and planning issues and community involvement need to be at the heart of comprehensive cross-government road safety strategy if the numbers of road injuries involving children and young people in disadvantaged areas are to be significantly reduced.

Recommendations

This research provided some clear suggestions as to how the inequalities in road injuries for disadvantaged communities might be reduced by:

Developing and managing the physical environment
This broad area of activity is concerned with managing the high demands on densely populated urban areas, dealing with the legacy of older urban

environments not originally designed for cars and giving a higher priority to pedestrians. Suggestions include: taking planning measures to avoid the further intensification of housing; and ensuring that developments make provision for public transport or on-site access.

Managing traffic and effective enforcement activity

More effective and visible traffic management and enforcement activities to reduce the volume and speed of traffic in disadvantaged areas and so reduce the risks for child pedestrians. Working with the local community to identify areas of particular risk and determining an appropriate response.

Changing behaviours and attitudes

The research suggests that future road safety communication activities need to be designed to ensure that they use language, imagery and media that make the content relevant to people in disadvantaged areas – and, in some cases, their ethnicity/culture as well as age. The application of marketing tools such as MOSAIC can be appropriate for identifying and engaging key groups.

Integrating road safety into other policy agendas

The research has indicated that there would be considerable value in ensuring that road safety issues are incorporated at a high level within a wide range of organisations so that they become entrenched in strategic-level planning and policy by organisations and departments outside of those explicitly focused on local authority road safety.

Increasing the level of co-ordinated partnership working at an operational level

It would appear that there is scope for more joined-up working at an operational level, including linkages with the police, fire and rescue and other emergency services, community safety, community development, health, children's services, regeneration, housing and neighbourhood management, recreation management and planning. Some of these partners will have a role in the development and management of the physical environment – a central theme. For all partners, it is important that they understand their role and how it directly or indirectly can contribute to reducing road casualty levels and injury inequalities.

About the project

Multiple research methods were used to explore the relationship between road safety and disadvantage. These included a review of the literature, statistical analysis of road casualty data, interviews with road safety practitioners and policy-makers. A semi-ethnographic approach was used to explore the perspectives and experiences of those living in five disadvantaged case study areas and one relatively affluent area. Qualitative interviews and focus groups were undertaken with key members of the community, including parents, representatives from local community groups and businesses, young adults and children aged 8–18. Observations were also conducted.

Further information