



National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) Offers Protection for Children and Adolescents

More than 1,300 children died as a result of abuse or neglect in 2004, according to the Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children, Youth and Families. Additionally, studies suggest that between 3.3 and 10 million children witness some form of domestic violence annually. Child abuse and other violence involving children and adolescents remains a significant problem in America, and it is only through a comprehensive understanding of its root causes that many needless deaths can be prevented.

A vital public health tool available for understanding violence is the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2002. Now underway in 17 states, NVDRS links data from medical examiners and coroners, law enforcement reports and other sources to provide a more complete picture of the circumstances surrounding violent deaths such as homicide and suicide so that effective prevention policies may be developed.

Although the program is still in its early stages, the benefits of NVDRS are already evident. The following are examples of how NVDRS data is informing programs to protect children and adolescents from violence.

Massachusetts Tracks Children at Risk

With data generated by NVDRS, state health officials in Massachusetts have been able to monitor suicides and homicides more accurately among specific populations, such as foster children and youths in custody. The NVDRS data has been used to secure grants for violence prevention programs for these special populations, about whom data had previously been impossible to obtain.

Seven States Identify Homicide Risks for Infants and Young Children

Children are most vulnerable and most dependent on their caregivers during infancy and early childhood. Sadly, NVDRS data has shown that young children are at the greatest risk of homicide in their primary care environments. Combined NVDRS data from Alaska, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon,

South Carolina and Virginia determined that African American children four years old and under are more than four times more likely to be victims of homicide than Caucasian children, and that homicides of children four and under are most often committed by a parent or caregiver in the home. The data also shows that household items, or “weapons of opportunity,” were most commonly used, suggesting that poor stress responses may be factors in these deaths. Knowing the demographics and methods of abusers can lead to more effective, targeted prevention programs.

Risk Factors for Teen Suicide

Data from NVDRS pilot sites in Connecticut, Maine, Utah, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and California found that almost 30 percent of suicide victims age 17 and under told someone they felt suicidal. Many teen suicides also appear to be linked to recent events in their lives, with nearly one-third of suicides taking place on the same day as a crisis and almost half within the same week. This data underscores the importance of developing community-based programs to rapidly respond to the warning signs of suicide.

Implement NVDRS in all 50 States

While state-specific information provides enormous value to local public health and law enforcement officials, national data from all 50 states, the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia must be obtained to complete the picture and establish effective national family-violence prevention policies and programs.

At an estimated annual cost of \$20 million, NVDRS is a relatively low-cost program that yields high-caliber results. The National Violence Prevention Network, a coalition of national organizations who advocate for health and welfare, violence and suicide prevention and law enforcement, is asking Congress to provide no less than \$7.5 million for this critical program for fiscal year 2009. Our goal is to achieve full funding of \$20 million per year by 2011. The cost of not implementing the program is much greater: without national participation in the program, thousands of American lives remain at risk.