



MOTOR VEHICLE PASSENGER SAFETY IN NEW YORK STATE

RESEARCH & PRACTICE

The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and the Center for Injury Epidemiology and Prevention at Columbia University (CIEPAC) are partnering to improve motor vehicle safety in New York, including that of children transported in taxis and vehicles for hire. The two organizations have a long-standing partnership that has spanned across several injury prevention issues and projects.

NYSDOH and CIEPAC originally partnered to create a public education campaign on the value of age-appropriate restraint use in all vehicle seating positions, but the partners soon found significant gaps in the evidence base associated with rear seat safety in taxicabs. The publicly available data to which CIEPAC had access was missing key variables, making it difficult to speak to the effect of the exclusion of taxis from a law requiring children to be restrained in for-hire vehicles. Fortunately, NYSDOH maintains their Crash Outcomes Data Evaluation System (CODES) dataset, which links police and motorist crash reports with health data such as hospitalization, emergency department, and trauma outcomes, and that dataset was available for use in such a project. NYSDOH was eager to partner on using the data to answer key questions and to get the information out to the public, legislators, and others who could put the information to use.

The project was designed to include a student training component, and a graduate student from Columbia Mailman School of Public Health relocated to Albany for the summer of 2016 to work at NYSDOH Bureau of Occupational Health and Injury Prevention offices to conduct data analysis. The data indicated that children are at higher risk of injury in the rear seats of taxicabs compared to private vehicles.

Since then, the partners have jointly begun to develop an educational campaign on the value of restraint use in all seating positions within vehicles, and are providing local, regional, and national presentations to share the results and implications with others. The partners have been spreading the word with a wide variety of audiences, including children's safety experts, epidemiologists, researchers, and policymakers.

WHAT RESEARCH BROUGHT TO THE TABLE

CIEPAC contributed **considerable expertise** to the joint project with NYSDOH. For example, CIEPAC faculty's extensive knowledge of current research related to driver and passenger characteristics, seating positions, vehicle types, and crash types directly informed the study of child safety in for-hire vehicles. The **engagement of students** from the Mailman School of Public Health was mutually beneficial to both partners, providing an internship training site for Columbia students and adding faculty-supervised student data analysis capacity to NYSDOH.

The long-standing relationship between CIEPAC and NYSDOH, and the strengths that each partner brought to the collaboration, enabled the organizations to produce a **stronger application for funding for this and subsequent grant opportunities**. In addition, the partnership is enabling the two organizations to diversify their work **to impact additional road safety issues**, including those related to adult and aging adult motor vehicle occupant safety.

WHAT PRACTICE BROUGHT TO THE TABLE

Existing linkages between NYSDOH and various external organizations involved in motor vehicle safety moved the collaboration's efforts forward significantly, as maintaining already well-refined lines of communication, rather than establishing new relationships, increased the project's productivity. In addition, NYSDOH's **data access and technical knowledge** related to data linkages assisted the effort, as staff epidemiologists were able to work together with the graduate student on data analysis. **Practical experience with prevention on the community level** ensured that the project's findings would be used to promote the importance of vehicular restraint in an accessible way. For example, before the research component was added, NYSDOH had already begun to conceive of a brochure that could be distributed to policymakers and the public to promote safe restraint practices in vehicles' rear seats.

NYSDOH's **extensive experience with the day-to-day work of injury and violence prevention** allowed them to anticipate what would work for local communities, as well as with New York's policymakers. In turn, NYSDOH proved to be a **fruitful training ground for Columbia's graduate students**, who gained an understanding of the inner workings of injury and violence prevention at the state health department level.

“Research folks want to be doing research to practice, without a doubt. I've always found them very receptive to working with us.”

– Michael Bauer, NYSDOH



LESSONS LEARNED

WORKING ACROSS AGENCIES

- **Dedicated faculty research time** was a challenge to this joint effort. New York City is 2.5 hours south of the NYSDOH office in Albany, and CIEPAC could not access the data remotely. Fortunately, the graduate student performing data analysis was able to relocate to Albany for the summer months, aiding the project's operations greatly. To address distance challenges, partners suggest **accounting for funding for travel and staff time spent en route** when developing project budgets.
- A **student training component can be a valuable aspect to research-practice partnerships**, benefiting not only the organizations involved, but the students themselves. Securing funding early in a project's planning phase can help ensure the **most competitive and productive students are identified**. In addition, solid funding can allow **recruitment of students from underserved backgrounds** who may bring a valuable perspective to the work, but who may otherwise not be able to participate due to financial constraints.
- **Awareness of a partner's priorities and timelines** is critical to ensuring the partnership remains on track. Deadlines at NYSDOH are more concrete, and they have dedicated paid staff responsible for the activities to meet the deadlines. Universities in general operate on a different calendar than other sectors, with greater periods of commitments to mentoring, teaching, and semester exams, while the government's operations don't revolve around an academic calendar. **Knowing the various commitments of each partner and having flexibility in designing project timelines** will help to ensure that project milestones are achieved.
- Partnering with an organization that has a similar mission, but in a different sector, can lead to **opportunities to collaborate on other projects and expand each organization's effectiveness at accomplishing its shared mission and goals**. For example, CIEPAC and NYSDOH's joint endeavor combined expertise from the two organizations in their recent partnership on a grant to pursue projects focusing on improving motor vehicle safety in older adults.

BUILDING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

- Regular, pre-arranged communication sustained the team's efforts through **weekly telephone meetings and frequent emails** between project leadership. Despite the difficulties in accessing CODES data, the team believes that a long-distance partnership can be viable and beneficial, especially where there is considerable overlap of organizational missions.

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“I had partnered with city and county health departments in the training of public health students before in a variety of topical areas, but this partnership took on new meaning with its applied research component.”

– Joyce Pressley, CIEPAC