

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR INJURY PREVENTION AND CONTROL: ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Keywords: *capacity building, innovative research, injury prevention, implementation science.*

Introduction. The global injury burden is disproportionately concentrated in low- and middle-income countries. The iCREATE: Increasing Injury Capacity for Research in EAsTern Europe project, expands on five successful years of building injury research and education capacity in the countries of Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova. iCREATE **focuses** on building capacity for research, aiming to train a critical mass of researchers from Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova

Material and methods. iCREATE trainees conduct innovative research and develop evidence-based and best-practice guidelines for the prevention and treatment of injuries. The first funding cycle of the project was from 2016 to 2021 (iCREATE1) and was funded by the United States National Institutes of Health, and coordinated by the University of Iowa, USA, and Babes-Bolyai University, Romania (NIH/2D43TW007261). The second funding cycle of the project (iCREATE2) has been secured until 2026.

Results. The promotion of research capacity in injury prevention and control has been accomplished through the establishment of new curriculum across three partner institutions, conducting collaborative projects across multiple countries, and providing advanced MPH and PhD students and young professionals with opportunities for mentored experiential learning projects. During the initial funding cycle (iCREATE1), the project focused on acute care, road traffic safety, and violence against women and children, while in the second cycle of funding the grant expanded to include alcohol use and integrated a focus on implementation science. An 8-hospital emergency department trauma registry has been established, collecting 13,082 patient records, out of which 12,992 are included in a final database, thus expanding the data capacity of all partners. These registries have been utilized for student projects and trainee publications and presentations. In total, 40 MPH students and 9 PhD students received training, 43 experiential learning projects were mentored, and 13 peer-reviewed papers were published between 2016 and 2021, as a result of the aforementioned activities. Each consortium partner has hosted capacity-building activities such as injury prevention summer schools (n=3), annual injury-focused symposia (n=5), and skill-building workshops with over 600 participants attending. The work continued during the no-cost extension phase in 2022 as well, showing partner's continued engagement and dedication.

Conclusions. iCREATE is a successful program in building capacity and promoting injury prevention and control. The activities have led to the creation of a critical mass of injury researchers, the advancement of professional careers and leadership roles for partners, and the establishment of a long-term regional network for collaborative injury and violence prevention activities. The achievements indicate a promising future for injury research and prevention, with the potential for sustained progress and impact in the field.