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PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCES**<http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1134421>Available online at: <http://www.iajps.com>**Research Article****SAFE COMMUNITY CHALLENGES AND SUSTAINABILITY  
FACTORS IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY; CASE STUDY IN  
IRAN****Jafar Sadegh Tabrizi<sup>1</sup>, Homayoun Sadeghi Bazargani<sup>2</sup>, Mohammad Saadati<sup>3\*</sup>**<sup>1</sup>M.D, Ph.D, Health Service Management Research Center, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Iran.<sup>2</sup>M.D, Ph.D, Road Traffic Injury Research center, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Iran.<sup>3</sup>Ph.D candidate, Department of Health Services Management, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Iran.**Abstract:**

*Despite the growing trend of the safe community movement in the world, very limited evidences have addressed its challenges and sustainability factors. This study aimed to qualitatively investigate the safe community movement in Iran based on the experts' opinion. Using qualitative approach, an open-ended goal-driven questionnaire was used for data collection filled by countrywide safe community experts (n=8) in 2016. Moreover, 2 in-depth interviews were done. Study participants were selected using cherry picking method, firstly, and then we used snowball method to identify the SC experts in the country. Content analysis method was used for themes extraction. It was discussed that beside the increasing tendency to join the safe communities' network, communities must pay more on the main goal of safety promotion. Lack of national attitude, unclear inter-sectoral collaborations, high turnover of city managers and weak community participation were raised as safe community challenges in Iran. Moreover, long-term planning, country-wide policymaking and improving public participation were discussed as the main sustainability factors of a safe community. Despite the growing trend of SC movement in Iran, like other developing countries, it was faced with a chain of challenges including weak inter-sectoral collaboration, funding problems, political support and other factor. The results provide useful information for other countries, especially Low and Middle income countries, to adapt their local policies to effective safe community movement leading.*

**Keywords:** Safe Community, Challenges, Sustainability, Developing Country, Trend**Corresponding author:****Mohammad Saadati,***Ph.D candidate,**Department of Health Services Management,  
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**INTRODUCTION:**

Injuries are among the most challengeable issues in communities health, worldwide [1]. Each year, 5 million people lose their lives due to the injuries and developing countries have a big share of this accounting for 90% [2]. Road Traffic injuries (RTIs), violence, suicides, falls and unintentional injuries are the common injuries in the world [3]. Moreover, non-fatal injuries impose considerable costs and disabilities to the individuals and community [4, 5]. Injuries relation with countries development level is not a simple relation. Nordqvist et al (2009) mentioned that as the countries were developed and their income was increased, chilled and working age adults injuries and violence were decreased while elderly fall and suicide were increased [6]. Considering these facts, there was a need for effective movement to manage the problem worldwide. Safe Community (SC) movement was introduced in 1980s by Karolinska Institute, Sweden [7]. SC base theory was that the safety issues identification and resolving will happen by local community. Its aim was to promote community safety through inter-sectoral cooperation and capacity building in the community [8]. Now (2017/11), there are more than 360 designated safe communities in the world and has an increasing trend [9, 10]. The SC movement, especially in developing countries, had faced some challenges. Although, scientific literature identifying the SC movement challenges and sustainability factors were limited [11]. Nilsen et al (2005) had mentioned that program dependence on an individual and financial deficiency were the main challenges in SC success and sustainability [12]. On the other hand, inter-sectoral collaboration, active role of municipalities and defining a structure was introduced as SC initiatives drivers to be success and sustainable. Moreover, politicians and country council support was reported as prerequisites [6]. Iran has the 5th place globally, regarding road traffic mortality rate and 1st in Eastern Mediterranean region [13]. SC movement in Iran, like other developing countries, seemed to be a necessity to improve population safety. Iranian communities had started SC movement from 1998 and now there are 33 Iranian designated safe communities [14]. Despite the growth of the SC movement in Iran [9, 10, 15], there are very limited evidence based reports to analyze the movement in Iran. Identifying the challenges and success and sustainability factors of SC movement could lead to evidence-informed policies in national and international levels. Moreover, this will provide useful information for other countries, especially Low and Middle income countries (LMICs), to adapt their local policies to

effective SC implementation. The aim of this study was to qualitatively investigate the safe community movement in Iran based on experts' opinions.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:****Iran context:**

Iran is divided into 31 provinces which Ministry of Interior (MOI) appoints a governor for each of them as the national government representative. Each province is divided into counties governed by an executive (Farmandar) by province governor suggestion and MOI appointment. The counties are further divided into districts including urban and rural areas, headed by a commissioner (Bakhshdar) appointed by county executive. Each city has a council which is selected through election. The city council selects the mayor for a 4 years period. The municipality has the duty of city maintenance and development. Other organizations (health facilities, welfare, police and so on) are working independently with their provincial center. Municipality decision to be a safe community must be approved in an inter-sectoral session in the city level with the presence of the county executive (Farmandar) to promote inter-sectoral collaboration. However, most of the safe community projects in Iran, had started by health systems. It is essential to have political support, in local and provincial level, in the beginning. Mostly, safe community initiatives were integrated into routine responsibilities and programs of the organizations. Each organization is responsible for financing safety initiatives implemented by own.

**Study design:**

This qualitative study was done in 2016 to study the safe community movement trend in Iran. Because of geographical distance of the experts, a goal-driven questionnaire comprising 8 open-ended questions was used for data collection. Moreover, two in-depth semi-structured interviews were done by two of experts using the same questionnaire. The questions were about experts' opinion about safe community movement trend in Iran, Iranian safe communities' weakness and strengths, safe community challenges and success and sustainability factors in Iran and demographics. One week were given to response the questionnaire. This study was approved by ethical committee of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences.

**Study participants:**

Study participants were selected using cherry picking method, firstly, and then we used snowball method to identify the SC leaders in the country. So that we conducted an interview with the first expert (Iranian Safe Community Support Center, SCSC, head) and he introduced three experts in Ministry of Health and

Medical Education (MOHME) and in contact with them, they have introduced others. The process led to 15 experts in the country of which 10 people expressed their willingness to participate in the study. Experts were who have the experience of participating in safe community initiatives in country or provincial level. Moreover, they had research experience in the area of injury prevention and public health promotion.

#### **Analysis:**

The questionnaires and interviews notes were analyzed using Inductive content analyzing method. Meaningful codes (parts of the answers which were related to the study propose) were coded and then the codes were categorized. Inter-rater reliability test was not done, but the results were presented for two experienced professionals in safe community and they were agreed with results. Moreover, intera-rater test was done via coding repeating by Saadati M.

#### **Finding:**

The mean age of the respondents were 45 and most of them (60%) were male. 80% of the participants have PhD degree with mean work experience of 18 years. Only 10% of the respondents had academic educations other than medical field. Only 1 person was from municipality and 3 of participants were belonged to the MOHME and 5 experts belonged to the Medical Universities (Tabriz, Shiraz and Tehran) and 1 from national safe community NGO.

#### **Safe community movement trend in Iran:**

Experts believed that more communities were interested to be joined to the world safe community network. However, they had discussed that promotional use of international credits of being a safe community, dramatic activities and focusing only on the community designation will mislead the communities from the main goal of the SC movement, preventing injuries and safety promotion.

*"At the moment, most of the activities are done with promotional and political goals and the end is just belonging to the safe community network" (Expert 3)*

*"Communities in Iran have a great interest to be joined in world safe community network. This is a good trend and will lead to safer communities in Iran." (Expert 7)*

#### **Safe community movement strengths and weaknesses in Iran:**

*"Leading role of municipalities in safe communities creates a good pattern for other cities municipalities to more collaboration for safety promotion".* This was a description by one of the experts (expert 4) announcing safe community strength in Iran. Beside, another said that *"... high turnover of city managers leads to failure in safe community success and sustainability."* Encouraging inter-sectoral collaboration, major role of municipalities and NGOs participation in SC was introduced as Iranian designated safe communities' strengths (Table 1).

#### **Safe community challenges and sustainability factors:**

Experts opinions on safe community challenges and sustainability factors in Iran were categorized in structural (national and local) and functional sections. Expert number eight mentioned that *"safety promotion is not as a priority in public health programs. So it does not have any financial or human resources in health system over the country."* Another expert, head of SCSC, said that *"...safety promotion is not as a main mission of an organization in Iran (stewardship in not clear) and this has led to Lack of integrity in safety promotion initiatives."* However, it was declared that safe community could be facilitated and change to a sustainable movement if proper strategies were applied in national level such as developing national safety promotion road map. *"...beside the challenges, national policies for safety promotion could assure the safe community success and sustainability, such as developing safety promotion road map plan..."(Expert 10).* Lack of political commitment, budget allocation and unclear inter-sectoal rules were argued as the SC movement main challenges in Iran (Table 2).

**Table 1: SC movement strengths and weaknesses in Iran**

Strengths	Weaknesses
Global credit of designated safe communities	Safety standards non-adherence in some designated safe communities
Encouraging inter-sectoral collaboration in local level	Lack of unity in decision making processes and shared vision
Benchmarking from other designated safe communities in Iran	No specific trustee for safe community in cities
NGOs cooperation	Failure to active participating of local people in initiatives
Major role of municipalities	Frequently changes in city managers
Safety promotion and safe community experts presence in Medical Universities	Lack of long-term planning
Presence of international safe community support center in Iran	Lack of formal position in municipalities or county governors organizational structure
Being indicator driven	Lack of loyalty to the continuation of the project in local level
Being voluntary	Implementing easy and temporary interventions

**Table 2: Safe community challenges and sustainability factors**

Categories	Challenges	Sustainability factors
<b>National level – structural issues</b>	Lack of SC priority at the national level	Developing a comprehensive injury registry system
	Lack of political commitment of policy-makers	County-wide policymaking about safety promotion
	High centralization in public system	Developing national safety promotion road map
	Lack of comprehensive trauma registry system	---
<b>Local level – structural issues</b>	Unclear inter-sectoal rules	Developing inter-sectoral rules based on community characteristics
	Lack of integration of SC structure in existing public organizations structures	Identifying risk-groups in the communities
	Budget allocation problems	Defining process of local population active participation
	Undefined role of city council	Activating the role of local media
	Poor community participation	NGOs establishment and participation in safe communities
	Parallel activities of governmental organizations	----
<b>Functional issues</b>	Lack of Social cohesion in communities	Long-term planning
	SC effectiveness poor documentation	Creating safety demand in population
	Lake of shared and unique definition and vision of SC	Sharing success stories
	---	Use of new technologies in safety promotion

**DISCUSSION:**

Safe Community movement, like other countries, has attracted a great attention in Iran and has a growing trend. Alongside, transferring the SC movement philosophy, community safety promotion, was in question by experts. Regarding Iran context, chain of factors was discussed by experts as the Iranian SC movement strengths, weaknesses, challenges and success and sustainability issues. Inter-sectoral collaboration was raised as the main issue to effectively implementing safety promotion initiatives in the safe communities. This issue was raised as the main challenge of SC implementation in Japan and Sweden, too [6, 16]. Various organizations in a community tend to independently develop and implement action plans with little relation to other ones. Municipalities power in communities (or governors in Iran) to create and maintain the inter-sectoral processes could be a determinative factor in this regard [6, 17]. Their ability to negotiate and developing the bureaucratic relations and organizational structure of the safe community committees, will lead to more effective collaboration of organizations. Moreover, changes in the personnel in the organizations could not affect the collaborations, because it is organized [12]. Defining inter-sectoral rules, facilitates the collaboration between various organizations [18]. However, trust between professional staff of various organizations will increase and this will improve the safe community sustainability [6]. Considering, not only existence of inter-sectoral collaboration is important, but also, its effectiveness is essential. Through an effective inter-sectoral work, organizations share information, experiences and problems solutions and efficiently use the resources in the community towards common goals of safe community. Safety interventions funding was declared as one of the SC movement weakness and challenges in Iran. Similarly, Nilsen *et al* (2005) had mentioned that program dependence on an individual and financial deficiency were the main challenges in SC success and sustainability [12]. Literature suggested that good inter-sectoral collaboration will facilitate the interventions funding from various organizations [19]. Moreover, some organizations such as police, welfare and public health system receive a national budget for especial area of safety promotion, in Iran. For example, one of the main missions of welfare organizations in Iran is to support disable people and they have financial resources to do this. In a safe community, various organizations missions must be clearly identified and prevent the parallel works to save resources. Implementing safe community in a city needs to change the funds follow to achieve SC goals. Politicians and policy-makers must identify the

safety issues in the community and allocate the budget based on the community situation continuously. However, beside the budget allocation, developing national safety promotion road map and creating national solicitation on safety promotion is crucial point in SC movement. Nevertheless, long-term planning is the prerequisite for budget allocation which leads to project sustainability [20]. Moreover, long-term planning is one of the critical indicators of designating as a safe community [9]. Community participation was introduced as the cornerstone of community based interventions, which was reported as SC movement weakness in Iran. Safe community as a bottom-up process needs active community participation in identifying risks, planning, implementing and evaluation of the interventions. A two-way communication between municipalities and the community creates a way to inform the community about the safety promotion initiatives and encourage them to more participating [6]. In this regard, the role of media must not be neglected. Active role of mass media was discussed as a success and sustainability factor by the experts. Media has the potential to raise the public attentions to the safety and affect the knowledge, attitude and practice of the people and policy-makers [21]. Media in Iran are considered trustworthy by the community. Regarding, the experts suggested active use of media as a success factor for SC movement in Iran. However, strategies to use media in SC movement must be developed. Political support in provincial and country level was demonstrated as one of the most important factors for safe community effective implementation. It must be clearly expressed by the politicians to encourage the inter-sectoral collaboration and facilitate resource mobilizing for safety promotion initiatives [22, 23]. It is suggested to appoint a trustee in national level which be responsible for coordinating safety promotion activities in national level. Moreover, a national safety promotion plan must be developed.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

It was revealed that despite the growing trend of SC movement in Iran, like other developing countries, it was faced with a chain of challenges including weak inter-sectoral collaboration, funding problems, political support and other factor. However, the results provide some applicable suggestions which facilitate the SC implementation. Moreover, the results would be useful for other countries interested in safe community implementation.

**LIMITATIONS:**

Although only 10 experts (from 15 identified) were participated in the study, but thematic analysis showed saturation in main questions. Moreover, because experts voluntarily self-selected to participate in the study, topically related or experiential biases associated with their practice settings could not be ruled out. This must be in attention using the study results.

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