ROAD-RELATED DEATHS

Measuring deaths due to traffic crashes in the Pacific Islands

Introduction

Road traffic crashes are an important cause of death across the Pacific Islands, primarily affecting younger adults and resulting in too many preventable deaths at early ages. They are in fact the leading cause of death in 15-49 years old adults across the WHO Western Pacific region. Road traffic deaths have also been identified as a key indicator under Goal 3 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a target to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2020.

SPEED management

The fourth **United Nations Global Road Safety Week** will be held on the 8-14 May 2017, with the theme "speed management", and provides an important opportunity for the region to review how Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) can both prevent more premature deaths and help residents lead longer and healthier lives, and how we can improve our understanding of this important cause of death and injury through better data.

How is data on road-related deaths collected?

Data on road traffic deaths (and injuries) are collected through a variety of administrative data information systems at the national and sub-national level. These include:

- **National Health Information Systems (HIS):** for data on hospital admissions and emergency room attendance due to traffic crashes and their outcomes, and deaths certified by a medical practitioner.
- **National Civil Registration (CR) Systems:** for data on deaths both in and outside of hospitals. These systems usually record cause of death (linked to the health information systems and police records) as well, and may include outcomes from coroner's cases in countries where those processes are applicable.
- **Police Incident Information Systems:** for data on traffic incidents attended, including data on both the outcome (in the case of an injury or death), and conditions that contributed to the crash occurring. Other systems to collect data from first responders - such as data from paramedical services (ambulance or fire service) may also exist within the police information systems, health information systems or independently.

Ideally, data should be routinely collated and reported from these systems both at the national level (through period vital statistics reports, national development reports etc.) and at the regional level through reporting mechanisms such as the WHO Health Intelligence Information Platform (HIIP), and the proposed revision of the National Minimum Development Indicators (NMDI) database.

Ensuring that there is a plan to routinely collate and report road safety data should be a key priority in National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) currently being implemented or developed by many Pacific countries.

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Pacific Community / Communauté du Pacifique
phin pacific health information network
World Health Organization Western Pacific Region
UNFPA
Australian Bureau of Statistics
UNITED NATIONS ESCAP Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
QUT
unicef
PCRN Pacific Civil Registrars Network
FNU FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Traffic-related deaths are the leading cause of death in adults 15-49 in Asia and the Pacific, and appear in the top ten leading causes of premature death for nearly all Pacific countries where data is available.

What are the challenges in recording road-related deaths?

Deaths and injuries due to traffic crashes are recorded in several different data collections, depending on national and local systems. Accurate data is therefore reliant on data-sharing across multiple government agencies.

While there has been focussed attention and regional programs dedicated to improving both HIS and CRVS systems in the Pacific Islands over the last several years, investments in police incident information systems and other first responder information have been more ad-hoc. There is a need to improve data collection standards and data sharing at the national level across all sectors.

Causes of death related to injuries are also often poorly reported in the Pacific, either because when the death is certified the cause of injury may be listed without information about how the injury occurred (such as from a traffic-related incident, assault, fall or other causes), or because the death occurred without health personnel present and a medical certificate was subsequently not completed. Legislation requiring fatal traffic crashes to be reported through the police is not universal across all PICTs, and many do not have strong coronial procedures to investigate deaths.

Medical practitioners play an important role in improving data on causes of death (such as those due to traffic accidents) through ensuring medical certificates for deaths include information on both the injury and outcome, and how the injury occurred. In larger countries where it is not possible to ensure all deaths are medically certified, verbal autopsy questionnaires and/or stronger legislation regarding reporting fatal accidents may need to be considered.

What do we know?

Despite the gaps in our current knowledge, available (and draft) national vital statistics reports from across the region (from PICTs including Am. Samoa, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu) include deaths due to injuries among the leading causes of deaths in adults under age 60 or 65. Where data is disaggregated, many of these deaths are specifically linked to traffic-related incidents. A more detailed regional report is currently being compiled from these national data sources.

The **UN Road Safety Week is an important opportunity for governments in the region** to highlight the importance of reducing preventable traffic-related deaths and evaluate how to improve reporting at the national level to monitor progress.

Where can I get more information?

Check out the other fact sheets at: www.pacific-crvs.org and www.getinthepicture.org or contact the **Statistics for Development Division** at SPC at **crvs@spc.int**.

Further information from WHO (WPRO) can also be found at www.wpro.who.int/roadsafety. Information for doctors on certifying deaths can be found in the handbook from WHO and U.Q. at: www.getinthepicture.org/resource/handbook-doctors-cause-death-certification.

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