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Global road deaths

Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has updated their global mortality projections for the years 2008, 2015 and 2030. This briefing summarises these latest projections of road deaths, and highlights who is most at risk as well as where these deaths are occurring. Road deaths are compared them to other key causes of death.

This briefing also advocates for a wider approach which considers all motor vehicle traffic related deaths, similar to how WHO treats tobacco related deaths. All data is taken from the baseline mortality scenarios of WHO's Projections of mortality and burden of disease, 2004-2030, unless stated otherwise.

Current estimate

Of the total 59 million deaths in 2008, crashes accounted for over 1.4 million (2%). This is more than tuberculosis and almost 50% more than malaria, and over 60% of the deaths by HIV/AIDS.

Compared to other causes of injury, road crashes kill three times as many as drowning (361,000) or falls (436,000). The average daily death toll from crashes (3,940) is the equivalent of those killed in one week by war (3,805).

Table 1 Global Deaths (2008)

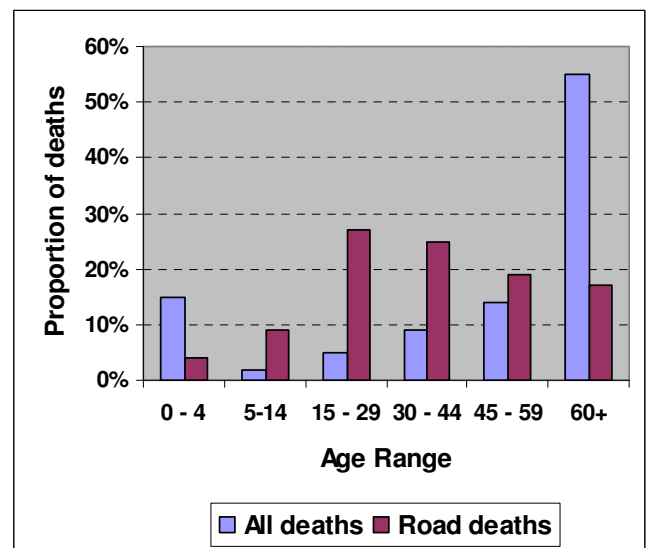
	Total
All causes	58,766,061
HIV/AIDS	2,242,597
Road Traffic Injuries	1,438,047
Tuberculosis	1,249,975
Malaria	837,624

Who is being killed on our roads?

On average, males are nearly three times more likely to be killed than females. This varies little between regions, with females accounting for a low of 27% in the Americas to a high of 38% in Africa, where there are more pedestrians.

It is not only the sheer number of deaths caused by crashes that is significant, but also the ages involved with crashes striking down young adults who are so often the income earners for their families. Seven out of ten road deaths occur to those aged between 15 and 59 years old, the most active group in society.

Figure 1 Age at Death, 2008



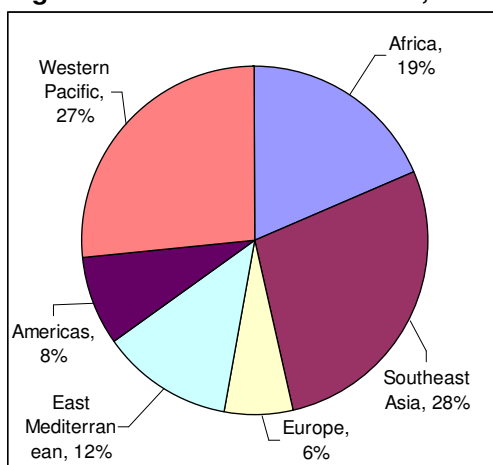
This is the age cohort that society can least afford to lose: as their upbringing and education is complete but most of their productive years are still ahead. This is also the age where the victims will leave behind both young and elderly dependents.

The UN First Global Road Safety Week in 2007 was dedicated to young road users. Those aged under 30 account for 40% of road deaths, and the under 15 13%. Over one in five road deaths in Africa is believed to involve a child aged between 5 and 14 years old. This same age cohort accounts for only 4% of road deaths in Europe. But for every child killed on the road, there are nearly seven times as many adults killed in crashes. Many more children will be bereaved than killed in a road crash.

Where are these deaths occurring?

More than 3900 people die in road crashes each day. Over half of the deaths occur in Southeast Asia and Western Pacific (including China), and another one-sixth of all deaths occur in Africa. These three regions have the lowest motorisation levels but account for over two-thirds of the world's road deaths.

Figure 2 Estimated Road deaths, 2008



Worse to come

As shown in Table 2, although road crashes are already a leading cause of death, the situation is set to worsen. Between 2008 and 2030, road deaths will increase by 52%, but not all regions will suffer.

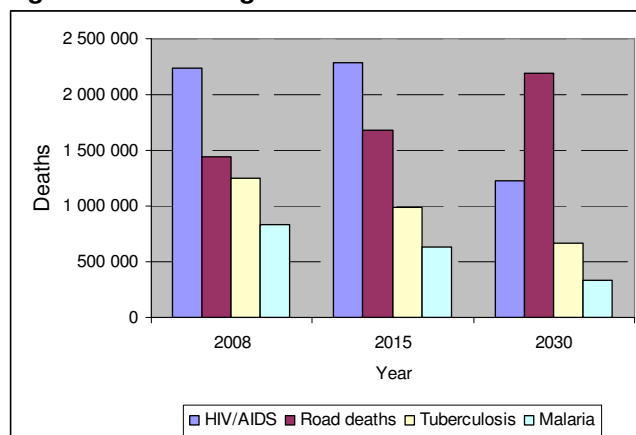
Europe is the only region where road deaths are expected to decrease. Africa sees the greatest rise as road deaths more than double (128%). Road deaths will also increase in the Mediterranean (71%) and South East Asia (68%). By 2030, only one in 40 road deaths will occur in Europe, less than half its current share.

Table 2 Road deaths by region ('000)

Region	Year			Change 2008-30	
	2008	2015	2030	No.	%
Africa	247	325	562	315	128
Southeast Asia	369	459	620	251	68
Europe	85	74	54	-31	-36
East Mediterranean	160	194	274	114	71
Americas	110	121	143	33	30
Western Pacific	354	390	425	71	20
World	1,438	1676	2,191	753	52

According to WHO, the relative significance of road deaths will increase over time, see Figure 3. Thus road deaths, ranked marginally ahead of tuberculosis and well behind HIV/AIDS in 2008, moves well beyond tuberculosis and towards the HIV/AIDS total in 2015. By 2030, road deaths will have continued to rise, while the overall toll of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis falls back in both relative and absolute terms.

Figure 3 Relative significance of road deaths



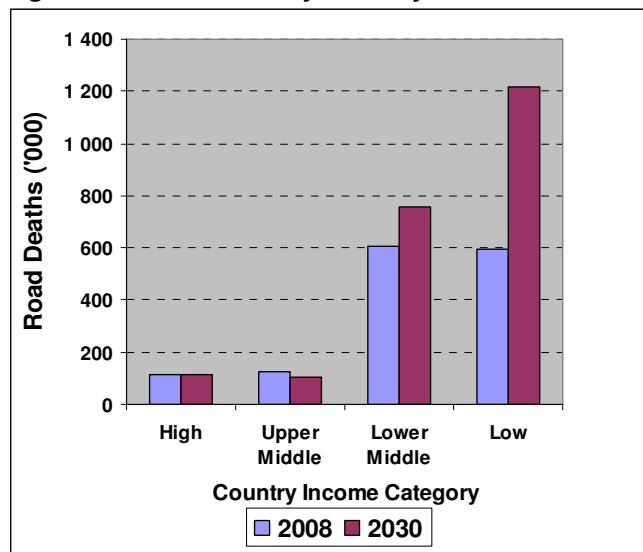
Development priority?

Countries were grouped into those with high, upper middle, lower middle and low income. At present, low income and lower middle income countries account for just less than six of every seven road deaths but, by 2030, this is projected to rise to nine out of ten.

High and upper middle income countries are projected to experience a decrease in road deaths while low income countries will have the greatest increase, with road deaths more than doubling by

2030 (104%). Lower middle income countries will see much smaller increases but road deaths will still be on the rise. Road crashes have not been a development priority

Figure 4 Road Deaths by Country Income



More deaths from motor vehicles

Road death statistics capture only a part of the human cost of our over-dependence on the motor car. Indirect deaths from air pollution, are also a serious problem, with the World Bank recently estimating 800,000 deaths a year from urban air pollution. Ninety percent of this is generated by motor vehicles (World Bank, 2008).

Over-reliance on cars contributes to the current obesity crisis and current speed norms intimidate many people from using more active (but vulnerable) travel modes (WHO 2002), like walking and cycling. WHO has estimated that around 3% of the disease burden in developed countries is caused by physical inactivity (WHO, 2002). In the UK, more coronary heart disease is due to physical inactivity (37%) than to smoking (19%), or high blood pressure (13%) (Britton and MCPerson, 2006).

Climate change research shows road transport alone contributes over 17% of world energy-related CO₂ emissions (Khan et al., 2007). The most recent estimate of deaths from climate change is estimated to cause 300,000 deaths and projected to kill 400,000 by 2030 (Global Humanitarian Forum, 2009).

Conclusion

Road crashes are already a leading cause of death, particularly for those in the prime of life. From a societal point of view, this is the worst age cohort for deaths, as these people have yet to pay back their debt to society and are often the main income earners for their families.

While other major causes are projected to decrease by 2030, road deaths will increase by more than 50%, with most of the deaths occurring in low and middle income countries, those countries least able to cope with these losses.

Motorised vehicles will be involved in virtually all road deaths and as noted previously, more deaths and disability are associated with motor vehicle usage.

While this briefing has focused on deaths, it should not be forgotten that for every road death, several more will be permanently disabled from crashes. Road deaths account for only a small share of the total social and economic costs to a country, caused by road crashes.

Dedication

This briefing is dedicated to those killed in Africa, where road deaths are expected to soar, unless greater priority can be given to their prevention. In particular we would like to mention two victims killed in just this past year the impact of crashes and what is being lost in Africa.

Susan Tsvangirai, 48, killed on March 6, 2009 in a crash outside of Harare. Susan was the cherished wife of Morgan Tsvangirai, Zimbabwe Prime Minister and mother of their six children. Her husband had said that marrying her was the best decision in his life. She was a deeply religious woman committed to helping HIV/AIDS sufferers and promoting women rights (McVeigh and Duval-Smith, 2009).

Dr. Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, 49, UN Millenium Campaign Deputy Director for Africa, killed in a crash on May 25, 2009 in Nairobi on his way to launch a maternal health campaign in Rwanda. The UN Millenium Campaign Director said *“Dr. Tajudeen’s towering intellect, moral fiber and courage of conviction allowed him to speak truth to power like nobody could. It is ironic that on Africa Day (May 25) Africa has lost one of its greatest voices and the Millenium Development Goals, its most credible advocate in Africa”* (End Poverty 2015, 2015).

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Appendix 1: Cause of death by age (2008)

	Total	0 - 4	5 - 14	15 - 29	30 - 44	45 - 59	60 - 69	70 - 79	80+
All causes	58,766,061	15%	2%	5%	9%	14%	14%	20%	21%
HIV/AIDS	2,242,597	10%	3%	16%	48%	21%	2.5%	0%	0%
Road crashes	1,438,047	4%	9%	27%	25%	19%	7%	6%	4%
Tuberculosis	1,249,975	3%	2%	16%	25%	25%	14%	10%	4%
Malaria	837,624	82%	9%	3%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%

This briefing was first produced by RoadPeace, on behalf of the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims (FEVR) for the First UN Global Road Safety Week in 2008. It has been updated as part of our contribution to the upcoming First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety. After campaigning for greater priority to be given to preventing road death and injury for over 17 years, we are keen to see the proposed Decade of Action start without further delay.