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Conclusions

Strengths and weaknesses of this survey

This survey is a first step towards a broad global assessment of road safety. It brings together a unique set of data on a number of road safety variables for 178 countries, accounting for over 98% of the world's population. It brings road safety into line with other issues such as climate change, tobacco and tuberculosis, where regular

assessments allow countries to monitor their progress over time compared to that of other countries.

The survey methodology was designed to increase the accuracy and completeness of the data that were submitted to WHO, by requiring respondents from multiple sectors to take part and reach consensus on the final answers. An additional benefit of the methodology was to foster



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multisectoral collaboration by linking road safety practitioners working in the same country. Some National Data Coordinators reported that the consensus group meeting was the first time that practitioners from different sectors had met to discuss road safety. As a result of the regional training workshops held as part of this project, networks of National Data Coordinators have been developed and are already being used to facilitate regional collaboration.

Nonetheless, as with any study, there are a number of limitations, namely:

- The comparability of data across countries is somewhat limited because of: different interpretations of terms used in the questionnaire (e.g. what constitutes a rural road or a highway differs between countries); countries reporting data from different years (2006 or 2007); and different sources of data used for variables (e.g. fatality data in some countries came from the police sector, and in others from the health sector, which has implications on completeness).
- The survey focused on national level data. This meant that, for the countries where risk factor legislation is enacted at the subnational level, the details on these variables were not recorded. Similarly, while many laws on road traffic-related risk factors are enacted at national level, enforcement and regulatory measures are often carried out at the subnational or local level.
- Finally, data collection in this project involved the use of self-administered questionnaires which can introduce a number of potential biases. In addition, a degree of subjectivity was introduced as respondents were asked to rate their *perception* of enforcement of the legislation on risk factors in their country.

Key messages and recommendations

This survey covered the magnitude of road traffic injuries as well as the existence of institutions, policies, legislation and data collection systems, and perceived levels of enforcement of legislation at a country level. The main findings are summarized as follows:

- Road traffic fatalities remain a major public health problem, with the highest fatality rates per 100 000 population in middle-income and low-income countries. Pedestrians, cyclists, and users of motorized two- or three-wheelers (“vulnerable road users”) together account for approximately half of all road traffic deaths around the world. Vulnerable road users are particularly at risk in low-income and middle-income countries in Asia.
- While many countries have a basic legislative framework in place for road safety, only 47% have laws relating to all the five key risk factors reviewed – speed, drink-driving, helmets, seat-belts and child restraints. Furthermore these laws are frequently not comprehensive in their scope.
- Enforcement of laws relating to these risk factors for road traffic injuries is perceived to be suboptimal in many countries.
- Institutional frameworks are insufficiently developed or resourced in many countries to be effective. For instance, while 76% of countries report the existence of a national road safety strategy, only one-third of countries report government endorsement of the strategy that has both precise targets and sufficient funding for its implementation – both of which are important for the success of a strategy.

- There are several limitations in the data that countries collect and report on road traffic injuries. Underreporting of road traffic deaths – a crucial indicator in terms of assessing magnitude – is a major problem in many countries. In addition, only 22% of all countries indicated that they had data on fatal and non-fatal road traffic injuries, estimates of the cost to their economy, and data on monitoring and evaluation indicators such as rates of helmet use and seat-belt wearing.

efforts must be well-publicized, sustained, and implemented through the use of appropriate measures and penalties for infringement.

4. Countries need to encourage collaboration among different sectors involved in collecting and reporting road traffic injury data. This involves improving data linkages between police, transport and health services, harmonization of case-definitions, as well as increasing human capacity to undertake data collection.

The results presented suggest that while most countries have taken steps towards addressing road safety, additional efforts are needed:

1. Governments need to take into consideration the needs of all road users when making policy decisions that impact on road safety. To date, the needs of vulnerable road users have been neglected in many countries and should be given renewed emphasis, particularly when decisions are made about road design and infrastructure, land use planning and transport services.
2. Governments need to enact comprehensive laws to protect all road users by setting speed limits that are appropriate to the type and function of the road, stipulating blood alcohol concentration limits that help reduce drink-driving, and requiring the use of appropriate protection measures. Existing legislation should be reviewed and amended to conform with good practices that are based on sound evidence of effectiveness.
3. Enforcement of all road safety laws needs to be improved. Enforcement

5. Governments need to ensure that the institutions that have been nominated as responsible for taking action on road safety have the necessary human and financial resources to act effectively. The evidence suggests that the development and endorsement of a national strategy with realistic targets and earmarked funding for implementation are important factors towards meeting long-term road safety goals.

The results of this survey can be used as a tool to inform policy decisions in conjunction with other international and national studies and programmes – for example, the United Nations Regional Commissions’ project on setting road traffic casualty reduction targets, or alongside implementation and evaluation of the good practice manuals developed through the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration. The results can also be used to leverage political support and resources for safer road transportation for all road users, including in international forums. One key milestone in international road safety events will be the First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety to be held in Moscow in November 2009. During the Conference, delegates are likely to call for a *Decade of Action*

on Road Safety. Should this proposal be endorsed by member countries, such a decade could be an important opportunity to further catalyse action. The results of this *Global status report* and the gaps it has identified should serve as key elements in the discussions during the Ministerial Conference on Road Safety as well as for planning the activities envisaged in the context of the *Decade of Action*.

An increasing body of research demonstrates ways to prevent crashes or to reduce the severity of injuries when they

do occur, and countries have taken many steps towards putting in place evidence-based interventions to make roads safer. At the international level, high-level commitment has been evidenced by various international resolutions and collaborative projects. This survey shows, however, that much more remains to be done. No country can afford to sit back and assume that its road safety work is complete, and the international community must continue to recognize road traffic injuries as an important health and development issue and intensify support for their prevention.