When reporting on road safety, the media sometimes inadvertently use road safety myths when framing their stories. This may not only result in inaccurate reporting but can also divert focus from more factually relevant and important road safety issues. Misleading messages can also confuse the public and may ultimately contribute to increasing risky behaviour. Some common misconceptions are described below, with explanations that will help media to separate fact from fiction.

**MYTH #1**

Road safety statistics and facts are not needed for news reporting on crashes, because crashes are just isolated episodes caused by human error.

**FACT**

Fatal crashes are not simply the result of wrong behaviour. More commonly, they result from gaps and faults in road traffic systems (see: Safe system approach, fact sheet 1) that fail to take into account and minimize the possibility of human error. When stories about crashes are reported without accurate data, they are indeed just stories about a single episode. When they are reported with data, crashes that result in injuries can manifest a broader concern in public health and development that requires urgent attention.
**MYTH #2**

Increased numbers of traffic road deaths are the price that low- and middle-income countries must pay in order to develop, just as high-income countries did.

**FACT**

Rising numbers of fatalities on the roads in low- and middle-income countries are linked to development and motorization but occur in large part because road safety concerns are not being adequately addressed as the transport systems develop. While road transport is vital to countries’ development, maximizing the efficiency of road transport systems without adequate attention to safety leads to loss of life, health and wealth. In the past few decades, important lessons have been learnt from the experience of high-income countries; these lessons should be used to mitigate the impact of increased motorization on human life.

**MYTH #3**

In countries with more road traffic deaths, people have a greater risk of dying in a crash.

**FACT**

Not necessarily. For comparisons between countries, use of the total number of road traffic deaths alone may be misleading because it can result in comparisons of populations of unequal size. Apart from countries with small populations, death rates per 100,000 population more accurately reflect the risk for dying in a crash than absolute numbers. That said, a country’s total number of deaths in road traffic crashes can be useful for conveying the magnitude of the problem in a country, to calculate the investment and services needed or to make comparisons over time.
MYTH #4
High-income countries have managed to achieve safer roads in a short time.

FACT
Australia, North America and several countries in Europe where a comprehensive approach to road safety (the “sage system approach”) is used have indeed seen marked decreases in road traffic deaths and serious injuries. These results were achieved, however, only after decades of “holistic action”. Low- and middle-income countries, where road safety management is generally weaker, should expect to invest similar amounts of time and effort to obtain similar results. This doesn’t mean that injuries and fatalities cannot be reduced in the short term: in fact, the lessons learnt from high-income countries show that many cost-effective interventions can have a positive impact in the short term. For more information, read the fact sheet on Road safety: basic facts.

MYTH #5
More cars on the road means more deaths on the road.

FACT
Not always. It is true that when low- and middle-income countries motorize quickly, a lag in the introduction of safety measures can result in more road traffic deaths, including deaths of pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. When countries invest adequately in road safety, however, there is no simple correlation between the number of vehicles and the number of fatalities. In fact, many high-income countries continue to motorize but, with adequate attention to road safety, have managed to keep reducing the number of road traffic fatalities.
**MYTH #6**
One country, one set of road traffic data.

**FACT**
Unfortunately not. In any given country, road traffic data can come from a number of sources (e.g. the health sector, police, nongovernmental organizations, academia). Ideally, data systems should be linked and provide the same numbers; in practice, good coordination is difficult to achieve. In addition to data available from the different national sources, WHO’s *Global status report* on road safety also provides estimates of traffic fatalities. The report includes data from each country’s official sources – which can be underreported – as well as WHO’s estimates for each country. These two sets of figures are often different.

**MYTH #7**
Dangerous drivers are the main problem; educating them is the main solution.

**FACT**
There are multiple, often complex reasons for crashes. Countries that do best in terms of road safety have recognized this and focus on improving the safety of all parts of the system (the road environment, vehicles and road users) to minimize the impact of human error, as opposed to focusing predominantly on educating drivers.

**MYTH #8**
There’s no need to clutter a story on creative road safety measures with a lot of facts.

**FACT**
WHO urges reporters to check all road safety stories against known facts and evidence by researching studies or interviewing experts. While we support innovative approaches to road safety, solutions must be based on evidence. Fortunately, in road safety, there is a lot of scientific evidence about what works and what doesn’t. For example, while initiatives to offer yoga classes to bus drivers might make for a fun story, no studies are available to indicate that this measure is effective in reducing the number of road fatalities and injuries.

**MYTH #9**
Speed cameras are just money-making machines for the police and the state.

**FACT**
Actually, speed cameras are an efficient, cost–effective speed management tool. They can make enforcement consistent, help to deter offenders and reduce the need for individual police intervention. As they don’t require the collection of penalties at physical interception points, they can also help to reduce potential corruption in enforcement. In addition, countries where speed cameras are used most effectively, the proceeds are earmarked and reinvested into making the country’s roads safer.