

Action Vision Zero - Police reported road casualties and under-reporting

June 2021

Key points

- Many more people are injured in crashes than reported by police—**3x as many**.
- Use the Department for Transport ([DfT](#)'s) more accurate estimate of the road casualty toll (510k with 70k seriously injured).
- If you are using police reported casualty stats, be sure to describe them as such, i.e. reported road casualties – as DfT does - and remember that only a fraction of those injured report to police.

Under-reporting of road crashes is extensive. There is no legal requirement to report a road crash to the police, including those involving casualties, if contact details have been exchanged.

So, police reported casualties do not reflect the total casualty toll. This has been known for a long time but is often forgotten by the media and others. With the drop in reported road casualties in 2020, it is even more important now to remember that the police reported statistics only reflect those crashes and casualties reported to them by the public.

DfT takes under-reporting seriously and has invested in measuring it. See DfT's [Reported road casualties in Great Britain: 2019 annual report](#) for its discussion on how it compares five alternative data sources to that of police reported casualties. DfT has produced a spreadsheet comparing police reported road casualty statistics with [National Travel Survey](#) findings which included low, high and central estimates of the number of people injured in crashes. Using DfT's central estimate, it found:

By casualty severity

- Those seriously injured were 2.9 times as many as police reported (70k vs 25k).
- The slightly injured were slightly worse with 3.1 times as many (440k vs 144k).

By age

- With adults, 3.1 times as many are injured in crashes than reported by police (470k vs 151k).
- With children, it is 2.7 times as many (40k vs 15k).

By road user mode (adults)

- Car occupants account for the largest share of under-reported casualties (68% total estimated casualties) with 3.5 times as many as were police reported (320k vs 92k).
- Cyclists have the lowest reporting rate, with 4.5 times as many injured (70k vs 16k).
- Motorcyclists have 2.4 times as many (30k vs 17k).
- Pedestrians have the highest reporting rate but still some 1.7 times as many were injured in crashes than police recorded (40k vs 17k).

Average daily toll

	Police reported	DfT central estimate
Serious injuries	67	192
Slight injuries	395	1,205
Total injured	462	1,397

Source: [DfT \(2020\)](#), RAS54004

Comparison of National Travel Survey and STATS19

	National Travel Survey			STATS 19 (15/19 avg)
	Central estimate	Lower	Upper	
All road casualties	510	430	590	169
Adults	470	400	550	151
Children	40	20	60	15
Seriously injured	70	40	100	25
Slightly injured	440	360	520	144
Adult casualties				
Car occupants	320	260	390	92
Pedal cyclists	70	40	90	16
Motorcyclists	30	10	50	17
Pedestrians	40	20	60	17
Others	20	0	30	9

[Source: DfT \(2020\)](#), RAS54004 Estimates of the annual non-fatal road casualties in Great Britain using National Travel

How serious?

Whilst the DfT estimates that there are many more people seriously injured than are reported by the police, it is worth remembering that DfT's definition of serious injury is very wide. It includes concussions, broken teeth and overnight stays in hospital, including for observation. DfT also reports that hospitals annually report 35k admissions for road traffic injuries.

Just as we should not underestimate the true casualty toll, nor should we overinflate it by referring to all serious injuries as life-changing. Serious injuries will include those life changing and even life-ending (deaths occurring after 30 days from a crash are recorded as serious injuries in DfT's database).

How you can help?

Be accurate. Use DfT's estimated road casualty toll instead of police reported casualties. If the police statistics are used, then be sure to describe them properly and remind others that they are police reported. Remember that DfT's estimated national cost of road crashes of [£33 billion](#) is for both reported and un-reported crashes and casualties.

With reported road casualties decreasing by 26% in 2020, linked to the COVID pandemic, it is important to use the more accurate estimate of road traffic injuries. Road danger reduction campaigners know the toll from motor vehicle use is larger. But it is still important to use most accurate estimates of the number of people being injured in crashes.