

Action Vision Zero

Ending Road Danger

AVZ Blog: Under-reporting worsens

October 2023

DfT estimates the number of seriously injured in 2022 at 3.6 times that reported by police.

Key points

- Official road casualty statistics (STATS19) severely underestimate the true road casualty toll.
- Based on National Travel Survey findings, the Department for Transport (DfT) has found under-reporting has worsened with:
 - 100,000 people seriously injured in crashes, 3.6 times the 28,000 reported to police. In 2021, it was 2.7 times.
 - 490,000 people injured in crashes (inc. slight), 3.7 times the 134,000 reported to police. In 2021, it was 2.8 times.
- Cyclists have the highest rate of under-reporting with 8.6 times that reported by the police, with car occupants second (4.3 times).
- Children now have a worse under-reporting rate (4.2 times) than adults (3.8 times), unlike in previous years.
- The cost to the country from road crashes is estimated by DfT to be £43.2 billion, with 59% from casualty crashes people choose not to report to the police.
- The true road casualty toll should not be under-estimated. AVZ urges all to refer to DfT's estimate, rather than that reported to police. This amounts to:
 - one person injured every minute and
 - one person seriously injured every five minutes.

On 28th September 2023, DfT released their [annual publication on reported road casualties](#). Much focus will be on the headline statistic of 1,711 road deaths, and comparison with last year (1,558 road deaths) or 2019 (pre Covid) when there were 1,752 people killed in crashes. The [DfT](#) also reported a total of 135,480 injured in crashes in Great Britain in 2022, up from the 128,029 injured in 2021, but less than the 153,158 injured in 2019.

Here Action Vision Zero (AVZ) highlights the wider and worsening road casualty picture. Official road casualties are based on STATS19 and limited to those crashes and casualties reported to the police. DfT knows this is a significant underestimation and conducts research to determine the actual number of road casualties. Their National Travel Survey includes questions on being injured in a road crash and the estimates of under-reporting are based on the findings from this survey. In [RAS4201](#), DfT provides the estimates of under-reporting by road user mode and casualty severity going back to 2011. As shown below, the extent of under-reporting has worsened in the last year.

True toll

DfT estimates 490,000 people were injured in crashes in 2022, 3.7 times that of the 134,000 reported by STATS19. This includes:

- 100,000 seriously injured, 3.6 times the 28,000 officially reported.
- 390,000 slightly injured, 3.7 times the 106,000 officially reported.

Under-reporting increasing

Compared to previous years, [RAS4201](#) shows under-reporting to be increasing, meaning more people are choosing not to report their crashes and casualties to the police. In 2021, DfT estimated the number of seriously injured casualties to be 2.7 times that reported to police, and total injuries 2.8 times. This was an improvement on previous years but it appears that 2022 has moved back to the higher and more common rates of under-reporting.

Which casualty type

In 2022, cyclists had the lowest reporting rate. DfT estimates the true cyclist casualty toll is 120,000, 8.6 times that officially reported.

Car occupants have the next highest under-reporting rate, but at 4.3 times, it is half that of cyclists. Due to their much greater overall numbers, car occupants account for over twice as many non-reported casualties as cyclists, and make up 63% of the total non-reported casualties.

Pedestrians had a much better reporting rate with only 1.4 times as many people walking hurt in crashes than reported.

Motorcyclists are the only road user group that the National Transport Survey found to be over-reported to the police.

Children worse than adults

The DfT now reports that children have a worse (ie lower) reporting rate than adults. DfT estimates 4.2 times more children are injured in road crashes than are reported, compared to 3.8 times more adults. This is a surprising and worrying change, with parents not reporting crashes involving their children to the police.

True cost

In [RAS4001](#), DfT reports the total cost of road crashes at £43.2 billion from:

- £4.0 billion reported fatal crashes
- £6.8 billion reported serious injury crashes
- £2.4 billion reported slight injury crashes
- £4.4 billion damage only crashes
- £25.6 billion unreported injury crashes.

Plea to all concerned

Official statistics underestimate the road casualty devastation. This is true of crime in general, e.g. domestic violence, shoplifting, and cycle theft. Official statistics should not be used without qualifying them.

Please reference DfT's estimate of the true number of those seriously and slightly injured. This equates to one person being injured every minute (1.1 minutes) and one seriously injured every five minutes (5.3 minutes).

For more information, see AVZ's intro: Under-reporting of road traffic casualties.