

Action Vision Zero

Ending Road Danger

AVZ Briefing: Under-reporting of road traffic casualties

October 2023

Key points

- The true number of people seriously and slightly injured in collisions on the roads is much greater than commonly reported, and even greater than in previous years.
- Official statistics of road traffic injuries refer to those reported to and by the police. These underestimate the actual number of people injured.
- The Department for Transport (DfT) estimates that in 2022, 100,000 people were seriously injured in crashes. This is 3.6 times greater than the 28,000 reported to the police. In 2021, it was 2.7 times that reported.
- Cyclists have the highest rate of under-reporting, with 8.6 times that reported by police being injured in crashes. This implies that less than 12% of those injured whilst cycling bother reporting to the police. Car occupants have the second worst rate at 4.3 times.

AVZ calls:

- When referring to road casualties, please clarify if you are using the police reported statistics and include a reminder that these are underestimates due to under-reporting identified by national surveys.
- The DfT should collect data on injury severity in its National Travel Survey that is similar to its CRASH system. This will allow better comparisons and improved understanding of the extent of under-reporting within serious injuries.

Overview

Why is this important?

Road danger reduction is concerned with the harm caused by inappropriate and excessive use of motor vehicles. Road casualties are the most tangible element of this through the devastation this harm causes. It is important that their toll is accurately reported.

What is the impact?

Most road safety references, including road safety plans, use the police reported number of casualties, often without clarifying this number. This results in the road casualty toll being thought to be much smaller than it actually is.

Don't all casualty crashes have to be reported to the police?

Under-reporting is to be expected as there is no legal requirement to report a casualty crash to the police. Drivers are required to exchange contact details. If this is not possible, then they are to report to the police, as soon as possible and within 24 hours.

Is this a new problem?

Under-reporting has been known to be a serious problem for several decades. It is also acknowledged as a problem in other countries.

How is the extent of underreporting estimated?

The DfT has previously funded research comparing hospital records with police reports. Current casualty estimates are based on a comparison with the findings from the National Travel Survey conducted in England. The DfT also produced a central estimate and also a high and low estimate for three year averages (2017-2019). The annual central estimates shown below are for the latest year (2021), rounded up to the nearest ten thousand by the DfT.

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Under-reporting estimates

By injury severity

Serious

- In 2022, 100,000 people were estimated as being seriously injured in crashes.
- This is 3.6 times higher than the 28,000 reported by the police.
- In 2021, the under-reporting rate was 2.7 with 70,000 estimated seriously injured, compared to the 26,000 reported seriously injured.

Slight

- In 2022, 390,000 people were estimated as being slightly injured in crashes.
- This is 3.7 times higher than the 106,000 reported by the police.
- In 2021, the under-reporting rate was 2.9, with 290,000 estimated slightly injured, compared to the 101,000 reported slightly injured.

Injury by road user mode

Car occupants

- In 2022, 290,000 car occupants were estimated as being injured in crashes.
- This is 4.3 times higher than the 67,000 reported by the police.
- Car occupants account for more unreported casualties than any other mode.

Cyclists

- In 2022, 120,000 cyclists were estimated injured in crashes.
- This is 8.6 times higher than the 14,000 reported by the police.

Pedestrians

- In 2022, 20,000 pedestrians were estimated injured in crashes.
- This is 1.4 times higher than the 14,000 reported by the police.

Motorcyclists

- In 2022, 10,000 motorcyclists were estimated injured in crashes.
- This is 60% of the 16,000 reported by the police. This is the only mode where National Travel Survey respondents report fewer injuries than reported to the police.

All injury by age

Adult

- In 2022, 450,000 adults were estimated injured in crashes.
- This is 3.7 times higher than the 134,000 reported by the police.

Children

- In 2022, 50,000 children were estimated injured in crashes.
- This is 4.2 times higher than the 12,000 reported by the police. Children are now less likely to be reported to the police for having been in a collision than adults.

All ages

- In 2022, 490,000 people were estimated injured in crashes.
- This is 3.7 times higher than the 134,000 reported by the police.

Source

DFT (2022), [RAS4201: National Travel Survey data on road casualties](#)