

Backgrounder:

International Road Safety: traffic deaths and injuries are creating a burden of disease that will soon outrank cancer and HIV/AIDS.

*Top 10 Leading Contributors to the Global Burden of Disease**

1990		2020	
Disease or injury		Disease or injury	
1	Lower respiratory infections	1	Ischaemic heart disease
2	Diarrhoeal diseases	2	Unipolar major depression
3	Perinatal conditions	3	Road traffic injuries
4	Unipolar major depression	4	Cerebrovascular disease
5	Ischaemic heart disease	5	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
6	Cerebrovascular disease	6	Lower respiratory infections
7	Tuberculosis	7	Tuberculosis
8	Measles	8	War
9	Road traffic injuries	9	Diarrhoeal diseases
10	Congenital abnormalities	10	HIV

* Epidemiologists use estimated DALYs (disability-adjusted life years) lost as the measure of the burden of disease.

Source: Murray C.J.L., Lopez A.D., eds. The global burden of disease: a comprehensive assessment of mortality and disability from diseases, injuries, and risk factors in 1990 and projected to 2020. Boston, Harvard University Press, 1996.

The World Health Organization has developed this chart to show the rising role that road traffic injuries are projected to play in the global burden of disease.

By 2020, road traffic injuries are projected to be the third most important contributor to the global burden of disease, the World Health Organization reports. Only heart disease and major depression will take more lives.

While traffic crashes are a leading cause of death and injury in high-income, highly motorized countries, 90 percent of deaths and disabilities that result from traffic injuries occur in low- and middle-income countries. A disproportionate share fall among vulnerable road users—pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and those using public transport.

Road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death worldwide among young people aged 10 to 24. Each year nearly 400,000 people under 25 die on the world's roads—on average more than 1,000 a day.

In an effort to bring more attention to this issue, the United Nations and the World Health Organization declared April 7, 2004 "Road Safety" day as that year's World Health Day. Earlier this year, the United Nations marked the first Global Road Safety Week, April 23-29, 2007.

The single factor most responsible for this increase in traffic deaths and injuries is the rapid motorization that is occurring around the globe. Though linked to increasing prosperity, the pattern does not conform to what is known as "diseases of affluence." Typically, they are chronic diseases associated with more sedentary habits and higher caloric intake; they tend to supplant "developing world" diseases associated with poor sanitation and malnutrition. There is a correlation, but only to a point. Interestingly, when prosperity rises to a yet higher plateau, traffic crashes tend to play a relatively less important role as a cause of death and injury while rising in absolute terms because of the increase in the number of vehicles.

More cars for more people = more deaths and injuries on the roads.

Reductions in rates of traffic-related deaths and injuries are often associated with wealthier countries' tendency to have better engineering, enforcement and education, a nation's prosperity is no guarantee, as safety and death statistics of any number of developed countries can

attest. A concerted policy is needed, and it must be tailored to reach various risk groups.

In poorer countries, the primary modes of transportation—foot, bicycle, motorcycle, and public transportation—are also the forms that leave road users most vulnerable. Many institutional barriers exacerbate this built-in vulnerability:

- lack of adequate road infrastructure for motorized and non-motorized travelers,
- lack of enforcement of traffic laws and use of safety equipment such as seat belts, helmets and child safety seats,
- lack of timely emergency medical response, resulting in inadequate care for crash victims,
- lack of coordination among agencies and researchers in different disciplines and
- lack of reliable data to measure the problem and to evaluate countermeasures' effectiveness.

As is shown by the broad scope of topics in the accompanying [report from the Traffic Safety Track presentations at the 11th World Conference on Transportation Research](#), more attention is being devoted to this topic by a wide range of researchers.

Fall 2007

Vol. 4, No. 2

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