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The importance of poisoning vs. road traffic injuries as a cause of death in rural Sri Lanka. JArticle; PLoS One.; Vol: 2 No.(7) 2007_e599pp

Abstract : Road traffic crashes are considered by the WHO to be the most important global cause of death from injury. However, this may not be true for large areas of rural Asia where road vehicles are uncommon. The issue is important, since emphasising the importance of road traffic crashes risks switching resources to urban areas, away from already underfunded rural regions. In this study, we compared the importance of road traffic crashes with other forms of injury in a poor rural region of South Asia. We collected data on all deaths from injury in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka (NCP; population 1,105,198 at 2001 census) over 18 months using coronial, hospital, and police data. We calculated the incidence of death from all forms of intentional and unintentional injury in the province. The annual incidence of death from injury in the province was high: 84.2 per 100,000 population. Half of the deaths were from self-harm (41.3/100,000). Poisoning (35.7/100,000)-in particular, pesticide self-poisoning (23.7/100,000)-was the most common cause of death, being 3.9-fold more common than road traffic crashes (9.1/100,000). In poor rural regions of South Asia, fatal self-harm and pesticide self-poisoning in particular are significantly more important than road traffic injuries as a cause of death. It is possible that the data used by the WHO to calculate global injury estimates are biased towards urban areas with better data collection but little pesticide poisoning. More studies are required to inform a debate about the importance of different forms of injury and how avoidable deaths from any cause can be prevented. In the meantime, marked improvements in the effectiveness of therapy for pesticide poisoning, safer storage, reduced pesticide use, or reductions in pesticide toxicity are required urgently to reduce the number of deaths from self-poisoning in rural Asia.