**BRIEF REPORT**

Deaths from international terrorism compared with road crash deaths in OECD countries

N Wilson, G Thomson

**Objective:** To estimate the relative number of deaths in member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) from international terrorism and road crashes.

**Methods:** Data on deaths from international terrorism (US State Department database) were collated (1994–2003) and compared to the road injury deaths (year 2000 and 2001 data) from the OECD International Road Transport Accident Database.

**Results:** In the 29 OECD countries for which comparable data were available, the annual average death rate from road injury was approximately 390 times that from international terrorism. The ratio of annual road to international terrorism deaths (averaged over 10 years) was lowest for the United States at 142 times. In 2001, road crash deaths in the US were equal to those from a September 11 attack every 26 days.

**Conclusions:** There is a large difference in the magnitude of these two causes of deaths from injury. Policy makers need to be aware of this when allocating resources to preventing these two avoidable causes of mortality.

There is no doubt that international terrorism has contributed to injury and death in a number of member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and has crucial importance as a factor in policy making for all developed countries. Yet other forms of preventable injury are also important and warrant the attention of policy makers. As part of wider work on comparing the impact of international terrorism with other causes of preventable mortality, we compared the deaths from international terrorism in OECD countries with those from road crashes.

**DISCUSSION**

The comparison between the causes of mortality was limited, given that only recent data (years 2000 and 2001) were used for road deaths, compared to data for international terrorism over a 10 year period. However, this would have underestimated the differences, as the average annual road crash mortality rates for the 1994–2003 period would probably have been generally higher than the results in this analysis. This was because between 1990 and 2000 there was a 21% reduction in the absolute number of road crash deaths in 29 OECD countries.

International terrorism and road crashes are both causes of fatal and non-fatal injuries and both have important economic consequences. The two may even be interrelated, given an analysis that suggests that the number of Americans who chose to avoid flying following 9/11 and lost their lives in road accidents was higher than the total number of passengers killed on the four fatal flights on 9/11. Important differences exist however, in that even though road crash victims can also suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, the psychological impacts of terrorism can be far more widespread. The relatively uneven distribution of international terrorism deaths across time and place means that particular episodes have special impacts. Terrorism also differs in that it can have substantial impacts on national and international security arrangements, and on political, social, economic consequences.
and economic stability (factors that all need to be considered by policy makers).

Nevertheless, from an injury prevention perspective, this analysis indicates that a major difference between international terrorism and road crashes is the scale of the total mortality burden. The evidence base for interventions to prevent road crashes is also substantially greater. Policy makers need to consider these issues when allocating resources towards preventive interventions that can save lives from these two avoidable causes of mortality.

### Key points

- This study estimated that annual deaths from road crashes in 29 OECD countries are substantially greater (390 times) than average annual deaths from international terrorism in these countries.
- Policy makers need to consider the relative mortality burdens when allocating resources towards preventive interventions that can save lives from these two avoidable causes of mortality.

### Authors' affiliations

N Wilson, G Thomson, Department of Public health, Wellington School of Medicine & Health Sciences, Otago University, Wellington, New Zealand

Competing interests: none.

Correspondence to: Dr N A Wilson, Wellington School of Medicine & Health Sciences, PO Box 7343, Wellington, New Zealand; nwilson@actrix.gen.nz

Accepted 22 August 2005

### REFERENCES

Deaths from international terrorism compared with road crash deaths in OECD countries

N Wilson and G Thomson

doi: 10.1136/ip.2005.008979

Updated information and services can be found at: [http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/11/6/332](http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/11/6/332)

These include:

**References**
This article cites 4 articles, 1 of which you can access for free at: [http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/11/6/332#BIBL](http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/11/6/332#BIBL)

**Email alerting service**
Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

**Topic Collections**
Articles on similar topics can be found in the following collections

- [Epidemiologic studies](http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/11/6/332) (842)

**Notes**

To request permissions go to: [http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions](http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions)

To order reprints go to: [http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform](http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform)

To subscribe to BMJ go to: [http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/](http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/)