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Background Road traffic accidents are a leading cause of death and disability in the Republic of Botswana. Fatality rates increased by 383% (per 10 000 vehicles) from 1975–1998, with recent estimates indicating a 50% higher fatality rate per population than the global average. Few studies have systematically examined the characteristics of crashes in Botswana with a view of guiding road safety policy.

Aims To document the characteristics and severity of crashes in Botswana so as to inform road safety priorities.

Methods A retrospective analysis of the National Traffic Police Data of Botswana for the period 1994–2008 inclusive was performed.

Results During the 14-year study period, there were 235 456 recorded crashes and over the period, the number of crashes increased 116%. The increase in fatality crashes and serious injury crashes was, however, 18% and 0.9%. Overall 2.3% of crashes involved a fatality crashes, 6% were serious injury crashes, and 16.8% were minor injury crashes; the majority were property damage only crashes (74.8%). Of the fatality crashes, 31.8% involved a pedestrian (25%≤9 years), followed by run-off-road crashes into a fixed object (29%) and rollover crashes (11.5%). Passengers account for approximately 40% of all persons killed.

Significance The results highlight the need for road safety counter-measures aimed at addressing the high level of pedestrian crashes, particularly young children. Analysis of crash types also indicates a need for improved seat-belt use and speed enforcement. The high number of rollover crashes and run-off-road crashes highlights a key role for infrastructure investment in policy development.