Trends in the incidence of hospitalisation for injuries resulting from non-traffic crashes in New South Wales, July 1998 to June 2007

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To describe changes in the incidence of hospitalised injury for New South Wales residents involved in non-traffic crashes for the period 1 July 1998 to 30 June 2007.

Design, setting and participants: This study identified 37 480 NSW residents admitted to hospitals for injuries resulting from non-traffic crashes from the NSW Admitted Patients Data Collection during the study period. Injury rates were calculated by applying 2001 census-derived estimates of NSW population figures as the denominator, and directly adjusting to the age distribution of the 2001 Australian population. The significance of trends in rates was assessed by the per cent change annualised estimator.

Main outcome measures: Age-standardised rates of hospitalisation for injuries, and trends by inpatient demographics, travel mode and severity of injuries.

Results: The annual rate of hospitalisation for injury showed a significant increase of 0.7% per annum (95% CI, 0.2% to 1.2%) for NSW residents involved in non-traffic crashes over 10 years. Annual hospitalisation rates for serious injuries increased by 2.2% (95% CI, 0.9% to 3.6%). The hospitalised injury rate for motorcyclists and pedal cyclists increased significantly by 3.3% per annum (95% CI, 2.4% to 4.2%) and 3.7% (95% CI, 2.6% to 4.9%), respectively, but the rate declined significantly for car occupants and pedestrians by –8.3% per annum (95% CI, –9.5% to –7.0%) and –2.2% (95% CI, –4.2% to –0.2%) respectively.

Conclusions: The rate of hospitalisation for injury from non-traffic crashes increased significantly over time for NSW residents from 1998–99 to 2007–08, especially for serious injuries and injuries to motorcyclists and pedal cyclists. These findings call for continuing and specific effort to prevent road non-traffic injuries.

METHODS

Data sources
We used hospitalisation data from the NSW Admitted Patients Data Collection (APDC) from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 2008. The APDC includes information such as patient demographics, diagnoses and clinical procedures for inpatient separations from NSW public and private hospitals, private day procedures and public psychiatric hospitals.

Case definition
Patients hospitalised with injuries resulting from non-traffic crashes were selected applying 2001 census-derived estimates of NSW population figures as the denominator, and directly adjusting to the age distribution of the 2001 Australian population. The significance of trends in rates was assessed by the per cent change annualised estimator.

Mode of travel
Travel modes were categorised, based on the second digit of ICD-10-AM external causes, as car, motorcycle, pedal cycle, pedestrian, off-road vehicle (including special all-terrain or other motor vehicle designed primarily for off-road use), heavy vehicle (including pick-up trucks, vans, heavy transport vehicles and buses), specialised vehicle (including construction vehicles, vehicles mainly used in agriculture and on industrial premises) and other vehicle (including street car, three-wheeled motor vehicle and unknown vehicle type).

Injury severity
Injury severity was categorised using the ICD-based injury severity score (ICISS), which is an estimate of the probability of survival of an injured person at admission, ranging from 0 (death) to 1 (complete recovery). Patients with an ICISS score ≤ 0.941 (ie, a probability of death of at least 5.9%) were defined as having a serious injury. Other patients were defined as having a non-serious injury.

Statistical analysis
Statistical analyses were performed using SAS 9.1.3 for Windows (SAS Institute Inc, Cary, NC, USA). To allow for changes in the
RESULTS

Box 1 shows there were a total of 37,480 people hospitalised for injuries due to non-traffic crashes between July 1998 and June 2007. Most of those casualties injured in non-traffic crashes were males (81.0%), and aged between 15 and 64 years (64.9%). Among these, about 40.0% were motorcyclists, 26.9% were pedal cyclists, 15.0% were car occupants, 6.1% were pedestrians, 4.1% were occupants in heavy vehicles, 3.4% were occupants in off-road vehicles, 2.9% were occupants in specialised vehicles and 1.7% were occupants of other vehicles. About 14.9% of those injured had serious injuries. Box 1 gives an indication of the place of occurrence, although this data field was often coded as “missing” or “unspecified”.

Box 2 shows that the overall rate of hospitalisation of people injured in non-traffic crashes increased significantly by 0.7% per annum (95% CI, 0.2% to 1.2%) over the 10-year period. The rate among males increased significantly by 1.3% per annum (95% CI, 0.7% to 1.9%), but among females, it decreased significantly by 1.5% per annum (95% CI, –2.7% to –0.4%). The rate of hospitalisation for injuries sustained in non-traffic crashes shows an upward trend over time in each of the three age groups, but only significantly for adults (aged between 15 and 64 years) by 0.8% per annum (95% CI, 0.1% to 1.4%).

The annual rate of hospitalisation for injuries sustained in non-traffic crashes (Box 2) increased significantly for motorcyclists by 3.3% (95% CI, 2.4% to 4.2%) and pedal cyclists by 3.7% (95% CI, 2.6% to 4.9%), but decreased significantly for car occupants by 8.3% (95% CI, –9.5 to –7.0), pedestrians by 2.2% (95% CI, –4.2% to –0.2%), specialised vehicle occupants by 3.7% (95% CI, –6.6% to –0.8%), and other vehicle occupants by 8.4% (95% CI, –12.2% to –4.6%).

DISCUSSION

Non-traffic crashes are crashes involving any vehicles that occur anywhere other than on a public highway. This study showed a significant overall increase in the rate of hospitalisation for injuries resulting from non-traffic crashes among NSW residents over the 10-year period July 1998 to June 2007. Although mortality appears to be low for non-traffic injuries (with the highest being 0.5 per 100,000 motorcyclists), there are substantial and increasing rates of injuries for non-traffic crashes. Moreover, while those with non-serious injuries (ICISS > 0.941) comprised the largest group of people hospitalised as a result of non-traffic crashes, and demonstrated a constant annual rate, the rate for serious injuries (ICISS ≤ 0.941) increased significantly over the 10 years. These findings suggest that the road safety initiatives which have contributed to a significant reduction in overall road-related injuries in NSW from 1989–90 to 2003–04 are less effective in preventing non-traffic injuries, especially for users of motorcycles, pedal cycles and off-road vehicles.

To minimise multiple counting when an individual has more than one episode of care for an injury event, we excluded episodes of care relating to transfers or statistical discharges. This variable has been shown to produce results most comparable to the “gold standard” provided by an internally linked inpatient statistics collection. Thus, although the rates for people hospitalised as a result of injury reported here may include some multiple counting, overestimation of the injury burden due to non-traffic crashes is likely to be slight.

Our use of hospital separation data limits our ability to investigate the underlying causes for the observed trends. For example, changes in admission practice may result in observed hospitalisation rate changes, although observed rates for serious injuries are likely to be robust against this possibility, because of the high probability of admission for such injuries. The hospital data include extensive detail of injury diagnoses but lack detail of pre-crisis and during-crisis factors, such as information about the use of protective equipment and exposure details (eg, how often a motorcyclist rides off-road). Thus, control for exposure could only be conducted in terms of population, and it is possible that the significantly increasing rate of hospitalisation for injury from non-traffic crashes reflects increasing popularity of these vehicles as a mode of travel or recreation on public roads. In the US, all-terrain vehicle-related injuries and mortality have increased in recent years with the increasing popularity of these vehicles.
done by way of investment in roads, or behaviour modification through enforcement. Nonetheless, improved off-road infrastructure and alternative behaviour modification techniques could be considered. One of the key challenges in this area will be to determine institutional responsibility for non-traffic crashes and the increasing burden of injury that they represent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Shanley Chong is supported by the NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre, with core funding provided by the NSW Department of Health, the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority and the Motor Accidents Authority. Wei Du is supported by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Australia–China exchange fellowship. Julie Hatfield is supported by the NHMRC capacity-building grant in population health. We thank the Centre for Epidemiology and Research at the NSW Department of Health for the NSW APDC data from the Health Outcomes and Information Statistical Toolkit (HOIST) analysed in this study.

COMPETING INTERESTS
None identified.

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(Received 30 Nov 2009, accepted 8 Apr 2010)