SWOV ARTICLE
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Road fatalities not accurately registered

Recent developments concerning the police organisation are decisive factors in the sudden sharp decrease of the registration level of road fatalities and serious road injuries in the Dutch national database of registered crashes called BRON. This is one of the findings in a recent SWOV study into the registration of road fatalities.

Statistics Netherlands

Every year, Statistics Netherlands determines how many people have died as a result of road crashes. Statistics Netherlands uses several sources as a basis: information provided by medical examiners who have performed the autopsies, files provided by district public prosecutor's offices, and the BRON database which contains the characteristics of road crashes and casualties that are registered by the police. The SWOV study showed that on the basis of the available data Statistics Netherlands correctly establishes the annual number of road fatalities in the Netherlands. However, at the same time SWOV also reached the conclusion that the method used by Statistics Netherlands can be improved upon. Not only the number of road fatalities is important for road safety policy and road safety research, this is also the case for the characteristics of these road fatalities and the crashes they were involved in. The most relevant characteristics must be obtained from BRON.

Registration level

There are many steps that must be taken between dying in a fatal crash and being incorporated in BRON. For example, there are road fatalities that are not entered in the police registration as such, and therefore will not appear in BRON. In recent years, the registration level of road fatalities has been decreasing steadily, but in 2010 it showed a sudden drop from about 90% to 84%. The registration of serious road injuries is even less accurate. SWOV has investigated which factors have played a role in the sudden sharp decline of the registration level in BRON in 2010. The conclusion was that the decline coincides with two recent developments concerning the police.
Firstly, as of 1 January 2010 the so-called registration set has been abolished. This was a form that the police had to fill in at serious crashes and that contained extensive information. For certain fatal crashes the police can presently suffice with writing a report of their findings. For non-fatal crashes and if no legal action needs to be taken in relation with the crash, a characteristics report is sufficient. However, this often does not contain sufficient information to enter the crash in BRON.
Secondly, in 2009 the police switched to one overall registration system, the Basic Enforcement Facility (BVH). In 2010, the Netherlands Court of Audit investigated the decisionmaking concerning the introduction of BVH.
The conclusions of the Netherlands Court of Audit indicate that the introduction of BVH can negatively affect the quality of the crash registration.

Recommendations

The SWOV study has resulted in several recommendations that may improve the registration of the numbers of road fatalities and serious road injuries. For example, SWOV suggests considering the reintroduction of the registration set for road fatalities and serious road injuries. SWOV also proposes to add more

variables to the characteristics report which will make linking with information from other sources easier. The software that is used by the police organisation must be made more user-friendly to enable more complete registration. SWOV expects this to lead to better data quality as well as to more efficient registration. In addition, SWOV recommends investigating the added value of Statistics Netherlands using data from the National Medical Registration (LMR). The advice is to do this as soon as the 2010 LMR data has been made available.

This study is described in the following SWOV report:

The registration of road fatalities in the Netherlands. M. Vis, M. Reurings, N. Bos, H. Stipdonk & F. Wegman. R2011-10. SWOV, Leidschendam.

The report is in Dutch, but it contains an English summary.