RoSPA
The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

Road Safety Information

March 2007

RURAL ROADS

The nature of rural roads and the type, level and speed of traffic they carry differs significantly from urban roads. This means that the risks people face, and the type of accidents they suffer, on or near rural roads also differ from those on or near urban roads.

Due to the lower traffic flow on rural roads many people think they are safer than they actually are. But, the twisty and hilly nature of many of the roads reduces the distance that drivers, riders and walkers can see ahead. The higher speeds at which traffic normally travels on these roads gives road users less time to react and results in more severe impacts.

In urban areas accidents usually cluster at junctions or on particular stretches of road. In rural areas they tend to be more scattered and less likely to be at a junction, which makes road-engineering measures more difficult.

More deaths occur on rural roads than on urban ones. In 2005, over 2,000 people were killed on rural roads compared to just over 1,000 on urban roads.[1] The number of deaths on rural roads has also decreased at a slower rate than deaths on urban roads. The number of serious and slight injury collisions is higher in urban areas; in 2005 there were 164,298 on urban roads and 105,490 on rural roads. These figures suggest that while the number of collisions is higher in urban areas there is a greater chance of a collision resulting in death on rural roads.

Killed and Seriously Injured Casualties, GB, 2002 - 2005[1]

		2002	2003	2004	2005
Rural	Killed	2,218	2,245	2,092	2,102
	Serious	16,296	15,555	14,456	13,323
	Slight	94,605	92,958	93,175	90,065
Urban	Killed	1,208	1,261	1,125	1,099
	Serious	19,586	18,107	16,657	15,615
	Slight	167, 873	160,086	153,096	148,683
Motorways	Killed	224	217	164	204
	Serious	1,283	1,234	1,137	1,063
	Slight	12,763	12,578	14,144	12,515
Total		**316,056**	**304,241**	**296,046**	**284,669**

Surveys have shown that drivers, especially younger and inexperienced ones, on rural roads drive with less care than they do on urban roads, because they think it is safer to break the speed limit on rural roads and they believe these roads are safer because they are quieter.[2] Unfortunately, they often do not realise that rural roads present many unseen hazards, such as blind bends, hidden dips, animals and mud on the road.

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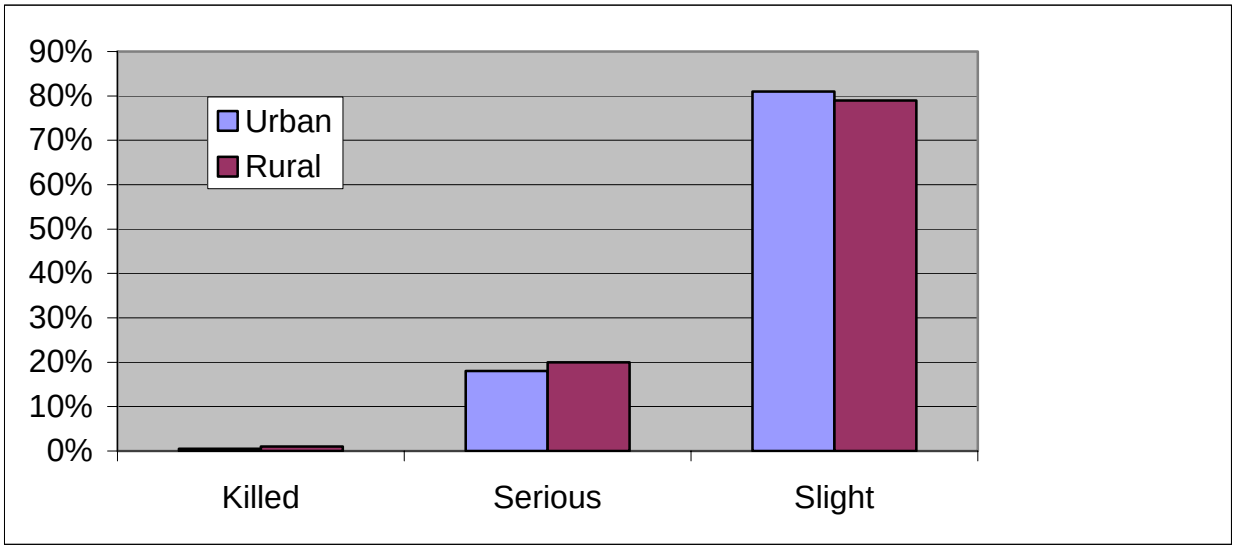
Pedestrians

The difference in traffic and pedestrian volumes between rural and urban areas means that numbers of pedestrian accidents will always be higher in urban areas. However, the issue is no less serious in rural areas. In 2005, 194 pedestrians were killed on rural roads, 889 were seriously injured and 3,067 were slightly injured.[1] In 2005, 14 child pedestrians (under the age of 16 years) were killed on rural roads, 278 were seriously injured and 1,080 were slightly injured.[3]

Child pedestrians on rural roads are at a greater risk of serious injury than those on urban roads. On rural roads in 2005 1,372 child pedestrians were killed or injured, of whom 20% were seriously injured and 1% were killed. On urban roads, 9,874 child pedestrians were killed or injured, of whom 18% were seriously injured and 0.5% were killed.[3]

Injuries to Child Pedestrians on Urban and Rural Roads, 2005[1]



Rural roads are narrow and often have no pavement or crossing facilities. Child pedestrian casualties in rural areas are more likely to occur when children are walking along the road rather than crossing it. Only 26% of casualties occur within 20 metres of a junction.[3] There are nearly twice as many child pedestrians hurt when walking with their back to traffic than walking facing on-coming traffic. By walking in the direction of oncoming traffic (as recommended by the Highway Code) a pedestrian is more likely to see the danger and take avoiding action by moving out of the way.

The lack of lighting may also be an important contributory factor in increasing the likelihood of a severe child injury in rural areas - 12% of child casualties occur in areas of darkness on rural roads compared to just 1% on urban roads.[3] Again, there are less likely to be streetlights in rural areas. A good way of being seen is to always wear reflective strips and carry a torch when walking at night where there are no streetlights.

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Cyclists

In 2005, 75 cyclists were killed on rural roads, two more than on urban roads, and 484 were seriously injured.[1] The high number of deaths among cyclists suggests that cyclists involved in a collision on rural roads are more likely to die than their urban counter parts. In 2005, 10 child cyclists were killed on rural roads, 100 were seriously injured and 602 slightly injured. Overall, 16% of all child cyclist casualties occurred on rural roads, but half (50%) of deaths and one quarter (24%) of serious injuries to child cyclists were on rural roads.[3] This indicates that when child cyclists are involved in accidents on rural roads, the injuries are more likely to be severe.

This is probably due to the nature of rural roads, which have more bends than their urban counterparts and have fewer cycle facilities to keep the children out of the flow of traffic, especially in areas where a cyclist is at higher risk such as bends and junctions. There is certainly a link between the speed at which a car travels and the severity of an accident; this is particularly relevant in a rural environment where the national speed limit applies over a wide area and also when speeds and speed limits change dramatically when passing through villages.

There is also a greater problem in rural areas of accidents happening close to driveways where vehicles pull out onto the road.

Car Users

The vast majority (80%) of car user deaths occur on rural roads, as do two-thirds of serious injuries.[1] The nature of rural roads: narrow, bendy but with high speeds is a likely cause for the severity of collisions experienced.

Over two-thirds (70%) of child casualties on rural roads are car passengers, whereas only 29% of child casualties in urban roads are car occupants.[3] This is because children make more, and longer, car journeys in rural areas, there is a lack of public transport, services such as shops are more dispersed, and car ownership is also higher.

In 2005, 40 children were killed when travelling in cars on rural roads, 381 were seriously injured and 4,613 were slightly injured. This contrasts with urban roads where there were 5,753 child casualties in cars, resulting in 11 deaths.[3]

The higher speeds on rural roads increase the chance that a crash will be fatal but there is also evidence that many children living in rural areas are less likely to wear a seatbelt for every journey and especially when the journey that they are taking is relatively short.[4]

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Motorcyclists

In 2005 390 motorcyclist deaths occurred on rural roads.[1] This figure is over double the number of deaths in urban areas. Motorcycle safety on rural roads is a major concern that needs to be tackled. The high number of deaths could be related to the fact that most motorcyclists use rural roads for recreational/weekend driving and might lack sufficient knowledge of the roads. The most common types of motorcyclist crashes are:

Failure to negotiate bends on rural A roads
This tends to be the fault of the rider, often because s/he approaches the bend too fast and/or misjudges the bend. They occur more often on leisure rides.

Collision at junctions
This tends to be the fault of the other road user, usually a driver failed to see a rider who was in clear view. Most occur at T-junctions, crossroads and roundabouts.

Collision while overtaking
Usually the rider is at fault, although this also includes riders 'filtering' through stationary or slow moving traffic, in which a driver is more likely to be at fault.

Rider losing control without another vehicle being involved
This is more common on rural roads, and often due to rider error, excessive speed, alcohol, other impairment, careless/reckless behaviour, poor road surfaces or avoiding other road users.

Horse Riders

One activity more applicable to children in rural areas than urban ones is horse riding. There are around three million horse riders in Great Britain, many of who ride on the road. Although they prefer not to do so, riders often have no choice because they need to reach bridleways and other off road facilities. Horse riders have a right to use the road, and both riders and motorists are responsible for each other's safety.

Horses are powerful animals that are easily frightened and can panic, especially near fast-moving traffic or at sudden loud noises. Accurate statistics for road accidents involving horses are not available, but the British Horse Society estimates that there are 3,000 such accidents each year, about half of which occur on minor roads.

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