

Britain: child road deaths three times higher in deprived areas

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Children living in the most socially deprived areas of England are up to three times as likely to be hit by a car than those living in the most affluent parts of the country.

A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and the Imperial College Centre for Transport Studies (ICCTS) published October 21, “Streets Ahead,” correlates the relation between pedestrian casualties and social deprivation.

All 71,076 reported pedestrian casualties in England since 1999 were mapped and then allocated to one of the country’s 8,414 wards (districts) using Geographical Information Systems software. To reveal the measure of area deprivation the government’s “deprivation index” was used, which gives each ward a “deprivation score.”

The study found that there was a threefold increase in the likelihood of a child from the most deprived ten percent of wards suffering injury or death on the road than if he/she inhabited the least deprived ten percent of wards. Fully a quarter of all road accidents occur in the most deprived ten per cent of wards.

Britain has one of the worst child pedestrian death records in Europe, ranking tenth for safety amongst the fourteen member states of the European Union. In 2001, 15,811 child (0-15 years old) pedestrian injuries were reported, including 3,306 serious injuries and 107 deaths.

In England and Wales, child pedestrian deaths were around 27 percent of all child accident deaths and 61 percent of all child road deaths (the remainder being accounted for by in-car casualties).

Some of the most glaring reasons why children from poorer working class families figure higher amongst casualties on the roads were touched on in the report. Those from poorer areas are less likely to own a car and

thus more likely to make journeys on foot in densely populated urban areas, increasing exposure to motor vehicles. Children in inner-city areas are especially vulnerable as they are far less likely to have gardens to play in than their counterparts from wealthier suburban-situated families. The “crowding out” of green spaces and overall lack of any other recreational facilities for kids in poorer areas will inevitably force them to play near or even on potentially dangerous streets.

The Assistant Director (Policy and Campaigns) of Transport 2000 said; “For far too long we have allowed over 100 children a year to die in this way, and we have ignored the evidence which shows that child pedestrians from poorer communities are several times more likely to die than their peers from more well-off communities.”

A less detailed report published by the IPPR in January 2001 showed that members from poorer households were five times as likely to be killed on the roads than those from the richest section of the population. A study of Edinburgh and Lothian region, in Scotland, revealed that children from the poorest districts were almost eight times as likely to be knocked down as those from the richest areas.

At that time the government balked at the £3 billion cost of introducing speed restrictions and other traffic-calming measures, such as speed ramps in the inner cities, which, based on tests in isolated areas, would reduce child casualties by 25 percent.

The report’s own recommendations are framed as an appeal to a government unwilling to spend money on infrastructure improvements that would mainly benefit the poor, arguing as it does mainly for more low-speed zones. The director of *Streets Ahead*, Tom Franklin, said, “The report’s recommendations are modest but effective. If they were implemented by government and

local authorities, they would cost a fraction of the total transport budget, and would quickly pay for themselves in casualty savings.”

Despite the public hand-wringing over the report’s tragic statistics, as far as those in power are concerned the lives of the poorest children in Britain are as worth as little as those of their parents before them.



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