Reviewer's report

Title: Road traffic accident mortality in Vietnam: Evidence for policy from a national sample mortality surveillance system

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Reviewer: John Fraser

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting article which increases understanding of the epidemiology of road traffic accidents in Vietnam. It has relevance to other developing countries where road traffic accidents are a major public health issue. It is also highly interesting to the readership as an example of using verbal autopsy to increase understanding in the patterns of death. The aim is described as “This paper presents characteristics, user type pattern, and cause of 1,061 deaths attributable to RTIs, which were ascertained from the surveillance sites over the two year period, and discusses policy implications for the prevention of road accident mortality in Vietnam.” The paper can answer the first part of the aim based on the methods used and data obtained. There are limitations in terms of using the findings to discuss implications for policy.

The methods are well described. In effect this is a cross sectional survey of deaths using verbal autopsy methods. The use of the verbal autopsy allows the pattern of road traffic accidents to be described where there are limitations of existing data sources.

(Discretionary Revision) The author may wish to include a sentence or two on Ngo et al findings) I found I needed to get more details of this method to assess its reliability and validity to better assess your paper. The other issue which the author may wish to comment on further is the acceptability of verbal autopsy to relatives of the deceased. An alternative explanation of the low use of alcohol in this study, may relate to recall bias where relatives may not want to disclose the fact alcohol was involved.

Compulsory Revision

The discussion and conclusion section and the title draw conclusions on the use of helmets use policy which is beyond the scope of this cross sectional survey. Based on the given data it is impossible to comment on the effectiveness of the helmet enforcement policy. We are uncertain what proportion of deceased wore a helmet, or what proportion of road users overall used helmuts. Nevertheless, this paper raises areas for further investigation and research in view of the finding of a high number of motor cycle related deaths were associated with head injury. Perhaps you may like to recommend what further studies you would like to conduct to explore this issue further to explore your hypothesis that the helmet use rate has not changed with respect to the new policy.
Similarly, the finding that there were few deaths transferred to hospital raises concerns “that conspicuous gaps in responses of the health system to road traffic injuries and death exist” but does not prove this assertion, further investigation is need to assess the present system and gaps to accessing it for patients before recommendations to expand “wider dissemination of first aid services and expansion of the pre-hospital trauma care system in Vietnam” are made.

The present paper is hypothesis generating rather than proving the need for changes in policy.

Comment (discretionary)

A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches may be needed to explore RTI in Vietnam and the present policies further. A recent Thesis has used this approach in rural Thailand.


**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests