

BOOK REVIEW

Adrian K. Lund,¹ Ph.D.

A Review of Road Accident Statistics

REFERENCE: Hutchinson, T. P., *Road Accident Statistics*, Rumsby Scientific Publishing, P.O. Box 76, Rundle Mall, Adelaide, South Australia 5000, \$64.00, 1988, 292 pp.

The author, T. P. Hutchinson, states that *Road Accident Statistics* "is an account of the methods of collecting and processing data about the occurrence and consequences of road accidents, and gives numerous statistical tables as examples of the findings." An experienced researcher in the motor vehicle safety field, Hutchinson discusses in detail the serious limitations inherent in the two major sources of motor vehicle crash death and injury data: police reports of crashes and death certificates. He also discusses the problem of different definitions of such basic concepts as "road accident deaths" and how these differences can affect crash statistics. Issues of injury classification covered in the book range from descriptions of different classification systems and their purposes to consideration of the kinds of coding and analysis problems inherent in each. Throughout the presentation, Hutchinson sprinkles examples of data from different countries and includes replicas of the data forms used by representative jurisdictions to record them.

Although the contents of the book are quite faithful to the author's summary description, the purpose and intended audience for *Road Accident Statistics* are unclear. The broad, but often superficial, review of issues suggests an introductory text for relative neophytes in the field of motor vehicle safety. A young scientist just beginning to research the field or a newly appointed city transportation safety planner would find the overview and specific reference forms useful, and the inclusion of international data helps maintain interest in an otherwise dry subject matter. However, there is a danger for these readers. Despite cautionary statements about the reliability of official data sources, many tables are reproduced from those sources without comment regarding their trustworthiness. Researchers should be forewarned not to cite these figures without first carefully reviewing the original sources.

In Chapter 7, entitled "A Miscellany of Data Tables," Hutchinson acknowledges the danger of citing data uncritically, but then does so anyway, noting that the "book is aimed at a readership knowledgeable about these matters." Unfortunately, as already discussed, the readership with the most to gain from the book is not particularly knowledgeable. On the other hand, experienced road safety researchers are already aware of many of the issues. I suspect transportation safety planners, though perhaps less schooled in the issues, may be particularly tempted to use the statistics contained in the book uncritically in their search for scarce data to apply to current problems.

¹Assistant vice president, Research, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 1005 N. Glebe Rd., Arlington, VA 22201.

But, this is not to say that the book has nothing to offer senior road safety professionals. It provides an international bibliography of the research that has occurred regarding motor vehicle crash injuries and fatalities and of the methods that have been used to document them. The trick is to remember that the sources cited vary in quality and that the bibliography is an eclectic collection that one road safety researcher has found useful or interesting. Thus, *Road Accident Statistics* does not cite all the research on a given topic or even the best research in some cases, but its breadth virtually assures the reader of entry to the relevant literature.

Because this book focuses quite specifically on the methods used to collect and process data on motor vehicle crash injuries and does not cover mechanisms or treatment of injury, it probably has limited usefulness for readers other than road safety researchers or planners.