

How fatal is fatal? How serious is serious? A content analysis of newspaper reportage on road crashes in Ghana

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Background

The media play a significant role in road safety education and situational awareness, yet can also create biased perceptions through inconsistent road crash reporting.

Aim

This quantitative content analysis study set out to explore (1) the accuracy of road crash reportage by two major Ghanaian newspapers and (2) the extent to which the newspapers' crash reports are factual based on the official police report on the reported crashes. This aims to provide further opportunities to strengthen the media's role in road safety education and promotion.

Method

The study sampled the Daily Graphic and The Ghanaian Times articles on road crashes in Ghana from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2016. For comparison, articles published on the same crash were purposively sampled for analysis. Twenty-five common crash reports from both newspapers were flagged for analysis in a two-stage process.

Results

The study observed inconsistencies in the newspapers' reported crash details. Further, the reported crash details were also inaccurate when compared to the official police road crash reports. However, traffic fatalities were more accurately reported than injuries.

Conclusions

The findings implicate the media's road crash reporting standard and suggest an urgent need for collaboration between road safety stakeholders and media houses on improving the media road crash reporting regarding what is reported and how it is reported.

