

Observed percentages of cases over 29 years of age, increased from 39% to 47% in France, from 62% to 69% in F.R. Germany, from 33% to 45% in Italy, from 32% to 40% in Spain, and from 40% to 51% in Switzerland. Among countries with fewer AIDS cases, the median age group was 25–29 years in Poland and 30–39 in F.R. Yugoslavia.

Overall trends in incidence over time show a general increase in both sexes until at least 1991. Data for 1992 are incomplete due to reporting delays. The male-to-female sex ratio of cumulative cases is 3.6 (23491/6569). A marked increase in the sex ratio occurred in 1989.

Trends in incidence by age at diagnosis and sex show a decrease in the age groups under 25 years and a rapid increase of cases aged 30 or more, for both males and females. For the age group 25–29 years, smaller increases are noted since 1989 among males whereas among females this slowing down is less marked.

Similar trends are observed in each of the five incidence countries (France, F.R. Germany, Italy, Spain and Switzerland) except that in F.R. Germany and in Switzerland a decrease is observed also in the 25–29 year age group. In countries with few AIDS cases, trends are difficult to interpret. In

F.R. Yugoslavia, a rapid increase is observed in the group aged 30 years and over, with small increases in the 25–29 year age group and very few cases under 25 years. In Poland, a higher proportion of cases has been reported in the younger age groups (<25 years), but the very small number of cases makes any interpretation extremely hazardous.

In 1991 and 1992, more cases were diagnosed in the IDU group than in any other single transmission group.

Females tend to be younger than males. Overall age at diagnosis is increasing with time. In both sexes, incidence has decreased in the age group under 25 years and increased in the older groups (25–29 years and 30 years and over). These trends are noted in all countries with more than a thousand IDU AIDS cases. In countries with few AIDS cases but with high proportions in the IDU group, trends are difficult to interpret.

Changes in age distribution of IDU AIDS cases reflect, at least in part, the fact that cases with longer incubation periods are now being diagnosed. They could however also reflect a change of drug-related behaviour.

European Centre for Epidemiological Monitoring of Aids, Paris

World Health Day: Prevent violence and negligence!

At least three and a half million people on our planet die every year as a result of injury caused by violence, accidental or intentional. In an attempt to stop this disastrous trend the World Health Organization (WHO) had decided to devote World Health Day 1993 to the prevention of injuries. The selected slogan – „Handle Life with Care: Prevent Violence and Negligence“ – shows clearly that accidents and violence are far from being unavoidable. Let alone intentional injuries, suicides, murders and other crimes, most accidents occurring on the road, in the workplace or in the home could be prevented.

Victims of the road

About 700000 lives are lost yearly on the road. In addition, between 10 and 15 million persons are estimated to be injured, which represents a death every 50 seconds, and an injury every two seconds around the world. Developing countries, which account for almost two-thirds of mortality, are the hardest hit. But even worse, mortality trends are on the rise, unlike in industrialized countries, where better roads, seat belts and speed limits have resulted in a 18% decrease in mortality on roads over 10 years.

Among 33 developed and developing countries surveyed, Ethiopia, with only one vehicle per 1000 population, reported 150 deaths per 10000 vehicles – the world's worst safety record. The best level of traffic safety is that of the United States, the most motorised country in the world with 771 vehicles per thousand people, which reports 2.5 deaths per 10000 vehicles.

In developing countries, children under 15 account for 20% of all mortal vehicle fatalities, twice as much as industrialized nations. Pedestrians account for about 20% of all those killed on the road in industrialized nations and between 30 and 50% in developing countries.

High mortality rates, especially among young drivers, are attributed in large part to the influence of alcohol, especially in the developing nations, where there is little awareness of the relationship between the bottle and the wheel.

Although manufacturers have built safer cars, they still make them faster and faster. In 1967, for instance, only 10% of cars built in France could reach the speed of 150 km per hour; and 1987 75% could. Speed and engine power are extolled in advertisements.

A helmet for cyclists

In the United States of America head injuries account for more than two-thirds of all cycling fatalities, children between ages six and 14 being at highest risks. Wearing a protective helmet reduces injury to the head and the brain by 75%. WHO's specialists strongly advise taking this preventive measure, the importance of which is not yet fully understood. Australia is today the only country in the world where cyclists are obliged to wear helmets. The reluctance shown by some cyclists is difficult to understand, taking into account that no one denies anymore that motorcyclists are efficiently protected by helmets.

Falls, drownings and poisoning

Not all accidents occur on the road. Injuries also happen at home, at work, or at play. Here again alcohol consumption plays an important role, because the imbibers are more likely to hurt themselves by falls or by burns, more likely to overdose medicines, more likely to drown, for example. While in the developed world, trends show drinking levelling out or even decreasing in the developing world, trends are on the upswing – jumping over recent decades by at least 500% in Asia, 400% in Africa and 200% in Latin America.

According to WHO statistics, Seychelles and Bahamas are the countries with the highest mortality from drowning, and Hungary ranks first in accidental falls.

Most cases of poisoning are unintentional and most poison victims are children. A study carried out in the United Kingdom shows that of 1000 infants up to age five treated for poisoning, 55% had ingested medicines, while 37% had swallowed household or garden chemicals. The situation is different in developing countries where chemical

products such as pesticides account for most of the cases. A recent study in Sri Lanka showed that 50% of reported poisoning cases were caused by pesticides and only 16.7% by medicaments.

According to the latest statistics available in WHO, the former USSR, Finland and Poland are at the top of the list for accidental poisoning among males. As far as women are concerned, the Republic of Korea ranks first followed by the former USSR and Romania.

Murders and suicides

As for intentional deaths, about 200 000 suicides and 60 000 murders are reported every year in developed countries, compared with 550 000 suicides and 215 000 murders in the developing world. According to the latest statistics, Hungary has the highest rates for suicides with 48.4 per 100 000 males and 14.6 per 100 000 females.

Lost years of life

The years of life lost before age 65 is a striking measure of the impact of injuries and accidents which are responsible for the fact that hundreds of thousands of inhabitants of our planet, most of them young, die every year in good health. In the USA only, heart diseases and cancer account for 3.8 million years of life lost while injuries for 4.1 million years. Yet more is spent on heart and cancer research than on injury.

At a time when economic crises are jeopardizing efforts to improve the health of mankind, injuries of all kinds cost the world community almost US\$ 500 thousand million a year in medical care and lost productivity.

World Health Organization, Geneva

WHO declares tuberculosis a global emergency

The World Health Organization today took the extraordinary step of declaring tuberculosis a global emergency, warning that the disease will claim over 30 million lives in the next decade unless immediate action is taken to curb its spread. Tuberculosis is the leading cause of death from a single infectious agent, a bacterium that already infects one third of the world's population. Every year, eight million people are developing the disease.

„Tuberculosis is humanity's greatest killer and it is out of control in many parts of the world. The disease, preventable and treatable, has been

grossly neglected and no country is immune to it“, Dr Arati Kochi, Manager of the WHO Tuberculosis Programme said today.

„Modern transportation, increasing global business travel and migration, and refugees from wars and famines will ensure that TB continues to spread in the industrialized as well as the developing world“, Dr Kochi said. He was speaking at the start of a two-day meeting in London of the Co-ordination, Advisory and Review Group (CARG) of the WHO Tuberculosis Programme, which is hammering out details of the rapid measures needed to control the disease.