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**EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS
OF MEASURES TO IMPROVE ROAD SAFETY IN POLAND
AS A SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE**

Introduction

Road accidents are currently one of the key issues impacting upon health and social policy within many countries all over the world. Almost 1.3 million people perish on the world's roads every year, with a further 20 to 50 million people suffering from severe injuries caused by accidents on the roads, the victims of which often requiring long-term treatment. Within many economies around the world, road accidents are also responsible for substantial social and economic losses, absorbing 1-3% of GDP in most countries.

When assessing road safety in regards to the number of accidents, and above all the scope of their effects, Poland is classified as one of the lowest ranking performers when compared to other European countries. The main road safety concerns in Poland are: the dangerous behaviour of road users, mainly driving at excessive speed; road users driving while intoxicated; the low level of safety devices and lack of respect for the rights of other road users; poor quality of road infrastructure, and the poor technical condition of vehicles on the road.

Aim of the study

The main purpose of the presented material is to analyse the effectiveness of actions aimed at improving road safety in Poland. The detailed objectives within the presented works are: analysis of road safety in Poland; analysis of road accidents related to children, and the analysis of initiatives and programs concerning the safety of children on the roads; analysis of strategies and programs for road safety at a local and global level; analysis of the impact of road safety campaigns concerned with the reduction of road accident rates in Poland.

Material and method

Research was carried out using the qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods were implemented in the analysis of data on road accidents from various national and foreign reports, analysis of strategies and programs undertaken to improve road safety, analysis of documents and legal acts related to road traffic, and the analysis of domestic and foreign literature concerning road accidents. Quantitative methods were employed when conducting a diagnostic survey via an anonymous questionnaire, in which road users assessed the actions taken to improve road safety.

Results

The analysis of data published in 2017 shows that the number of people killed and injured in accidents on Polish roads has fallen by almost 30% in the last seven years. This is a significant improvement compared to previous years, but the potential to reduce the number of road accident victims is still vast, and the statistics are still alarming. Poland still occupies a comparatively low ranking place, in terms of safety on the roads, when measured against the rest of the European Union. Progress in reducing the number of fatalities and casualties on Polish roads could and should be faster. In Western European countries, better statistics go hand in hand with more restrictive regulations, and it is these types of regulations which should be incorporated into Polish law as soon as possible.

Research conducted in many developed countries has confirmed that the number of fatalities and serious injuries resulting from road accidents could be reduced by applying an integrated approach to road safety. Such activities should be carried out within all facets of the road safety system, including transport, health care, supervision, law and spatial planning.

After evaluating the effectiveness of actions aimed at improving road safety, it was concluded that many strategies and programs undertaken in Europe contributed to the reduction of accidents and their consequences. In Poland, the implementation of the most successful European solutions is not carried out with anywhere near appropriate rapidity, and the potential of already implemented strategies and programs is not effectively utilised.

Conclusions

In Poland, the excessive number of road accidents and their resulting consequences, as well as the enormous social and material losses resulting from them, prove that the current measures for improving traffic safety are not sufficient. Despite the development of various road safety programs and their acceptance for implementation by national and local government authorities, their impact is still not visible.

In order to improve road safety and reduce the severity of injuries resulting from accidents, it is necessary to recognise the seriousness of road accidents as an urgent issue. One requiring cooperation among politicians, experts and practitioners from research and university centres dealing with road safety, road administration, emergency services, police and the media.

An essential tool for the effective prevention of injuries resulting from road accidents is the adoption of a systemic approach, which includes the following elements: problem identification, formulation of goals, preparation of programs and strategies, and monitoring the efficiency of the activities carried out.

Strategies and programs aimed at improving road safety should include the following actions: reduction of exposure to the hazards of accidents; prevention of accidents; reduction of injuries resulting from accidents; reduction of the effects of injuries through the improvement of post-treatment medical care.

In order to improve road safety, it is necessary to strive for the change of legal provisions regarding the equipment of a car, and to intensify the educational activity in the field of first aid. As well as this, children of all ages should be exposed to intensive educational activities related to promoting road safety.