

Drowning statistics in Germany – Comparison of different reporting systems

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Drowning is one of the major causes for unnatural death in Europe especially for children as well as for elders. Nearly half a million people drown each year worldwide. The drowning figure of Europe was about more than 37,000 reported by WHO in year 2000. Nearly 5,000 of the drowning victims were children. Every second victim in Germany was a senior person 50 years of age or older. One of the main messages of the World Water Safety Conference in Porto 2007 was: Drowning needs more attention. Prevention needs better and more information about the real reasons.

The DLRG has been collecting data on cases of drowning in Germany since the year 2000. The collection is based on press cuttings. The cuttings are identified on the base of specified keywords by a large press cutting agency with partners in Europe.

In most cases, the data collection procedure enables an exact classification of fatal water accidents and their circumstances.

The parameters are

- Sex
- Age
- Date of the accident
- Place of the accident (ocean, lake, private or public pool etc)
- Assignment to regions
- What has happened and
- Contributing factors (boats surfboards, inflatable toys, alcohol)

The national drowning statistics based on ICD classification can not give answers to the questions where and how to prevent.

Death in the water has more causes than those of drowning according to ICD.

The real drowning figures are higher as in the official national statistics of death.

Statistics based on collecting press cuttings gives a lifesaving federation information for strategic decisions and activities in prevention. The objective of the analysis is to gain knowledge about where what preventive measures must be taken in order to reduce the number of fatal water accidents significantly in the future.

Fatal accidents are reflected in media reports to a particularly great extent. Therefore, press cuttings generated from such reports offer an abundance of information about causes and circumstances of deaths by drowning as well as background information about the people concerned.

The national death statistics should be completed with data from press analysis. The objective of any drowning statistics is to gain knowledge about what preventive measures must be taken and where they must be taken in order to significantly reduce the number of fatal water accidents in the future. The method is not expensive. The data can give information about drowning during different activities (swimming, surfing, sailing, diving, etc.) and dangerous locations. Thus, the evaluation and presentation of the results in the standard categories is carried out to a large extent on the base of the IDB (injury data base) code as well. Comprehensive statistics about non-lethal drowning injuries in Germany do not exist. There are only estimations of the dark figures available as well as for deaths late after the drowning accident based on research data of studies in smaller regions, which will be referred by the author.

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