



**Australian Government**

**Australian Transport Safety Bureau**

**Road Safety Among Indigenous Australians:  
A Statistical Profile**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Indigenous Road Safety Forum**  
Broome, Western Australia  
23–25 October 2006



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# **Road Safety Among Indigenous Australians :**

## **A Statistical Profile**

**3rd Indigenous Road Safety Forum**

**BROOME, 23 – 25 OCTOBER 2006**

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*This broad profile of road safety among Indigenous Australians was prepared as a discussion paper for the 3rd Indigenous Road Safety Forum and Working Group held in Broome, 23 – 25 October 2006. It comprises two sections:*

- 1. A demographic profile of Indigenous road fatalities based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) mortality data.*
  - 2. A comparative profile of crash types for Indigenous and non-Indigenous road fatalities in the Northern Territory, based on coronial data held in the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) Fatal Road Crash Database.*
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## **1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF INDIGENOUS ROAD FATALITIES**

This section presents a demographic profile of road crash deaths among Indigenous Australians over the four calendar year period 1999 – 2002. The analysis is based on fatality counts obtained from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) mortality data.

The ABS data are based on information recorded on death certificates. A uniform question is now used Australia-wide for recording Indigenous status on death certificates: “Was the deceased of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Origin?”

The ABS counts are known to understate Indigenous deaths<sup>1</sup>. The person completing the certificate (usually a doctor or funeral director) may not know if the deceased was of Indigenous status, and may be reluctant or unable to ask the relatives. ABS estimates of Indigenous deaths based on census data and life tables indicate that mortality statistics have probably identified only 55 to 60 per cent of Indigenous deaths nationwide from all causes over the period covered here (about 85-90 per cent in the Northern Territory, about 70 per cent in Western Australia and about 55 per cent in Queensland). The ABS counts may also contain inaccuracies due to differing definitions of a ‘road crash’ and from inclusion of deaths outside the standard requirement of death within 30 days of the crash.

### ***1.1 ABS registered fatality counts***

Figure 1 shows Indigenous road deaths registered Australia-wide between 1999 and 2002.

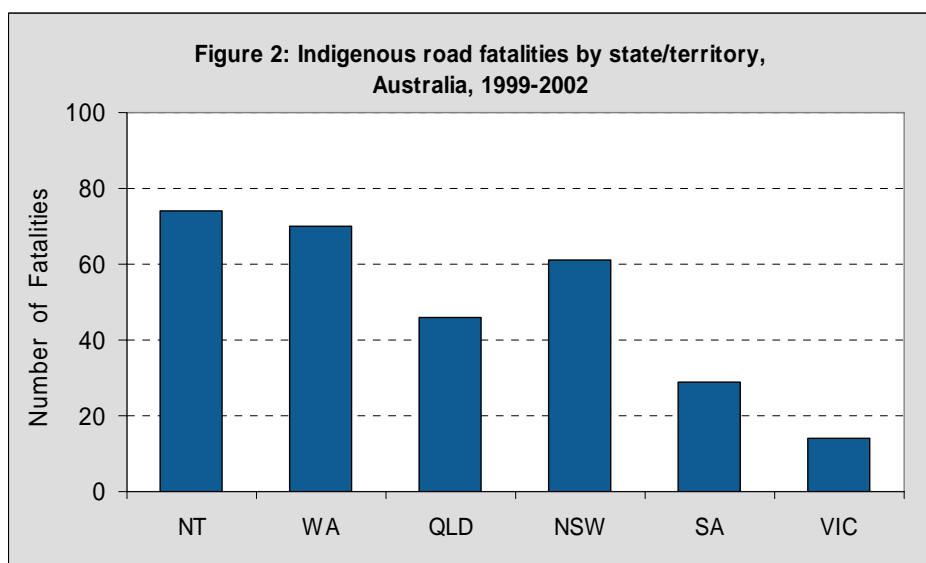


Source: ABS

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<sup>1</sup> ABS Deaths 3302.0

Figure 2 aggregates data for four years to show counts of Indigenous road deaths registered in each state and territory.



Source: ABS

In the Northern Territory and Queensland alternative Indigenous road fatality counts are available from information recorded on police crash reports, and the ATSB has been provided with these counts for recent years by the Northern Territory Department of Planning and Infrastructure and by Queensland Transport.

In Table 1 these counts are compared with the corresponding ABS counts.

Table 1: Comparison between Indigenous road fatality counts obtained from police crash reports and ABS mortality statistics - NT and Queensland

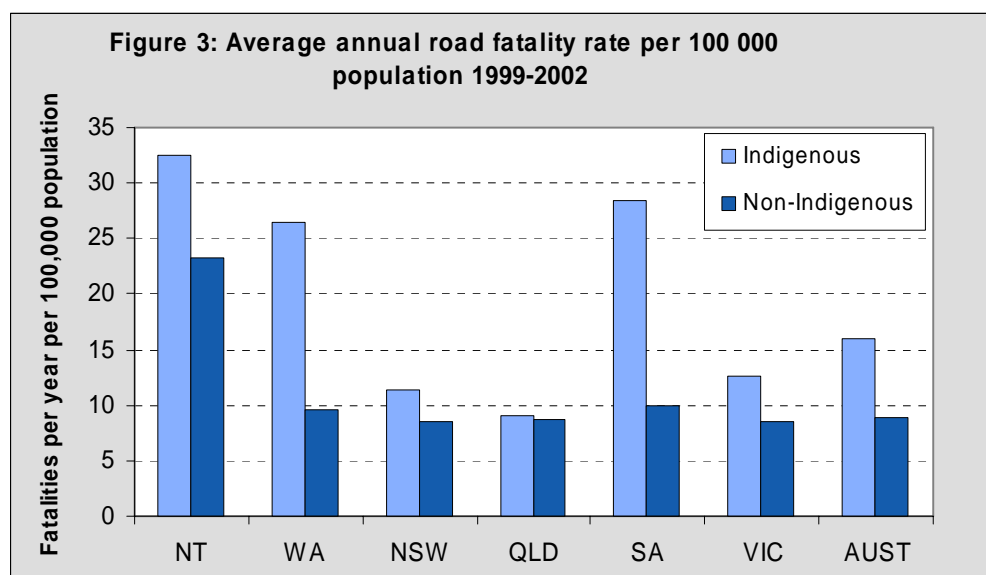
Source	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Northern Territory							
Police count	17	18	25	28	25	17	24
ABS *	10	17	22	25	na	na	na
Queensland							
Police count	0	4	4	17	9	15	14
ABS *	7	16	10	13	na	na	na

\* ABS data record the year of registration, whereas Police crash data show the year of the crash.

## 1.2 Fatality rates

Figure 3 shows the average annual road fatality rates for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in each state and territory over the four calendar year period 1999 – 2002.

The rates are based on (i) ABS mortality statistics<sup>2</sup> (ii) the ATSB monthly road crash database<sup>3</sup> and (iii) the estimated Australian population and ‘experimental’ estimates of the Indigenous population during 1999 – 2002 obtained from ABS demographic statistics<sup>4</sup>.



It may be seen from Figure 3 that:

- Australia-wide, between 1999 and 2002, there was an annual average of 16.0 deaths per 100,000 Indigenous population. This compares with an average of 8.9 deaths per 100,000 non-Indigenous population.
- The national Indigenous per-capita road fatality rate is 1.80 times that of the non-Indigenous population.

*Based on the level of under-identification estimated to exist nationally in ABS Indigenous mortality statistics for all causes of death, the national Indigenous road fatality rate may be **closer to three times** the national rate for the non-Indigenous population.*

- Substantial discrepancies are apparent among jurisdictions in the extent to which the Indigenous fatality rate exceeds the non-Indigenous rate.

*This comparison is clouded by differences among jurisdictions in the extent to which Indigenous status is identified on death certificates. Based on ABS estimates of the under-identification present in its counts for the individual states and territories, the Indigenous road fatality rate in the Northern Territory is perhaps 1.6 times the already-substantial rate of the non-Indigenous population in that jurisdiction and the Indigenous road fatality rate in Western Australia is perhaps 4 times the rate for the non-Indigenous population there.*

<sup>2</sup> Obtained by request from ABS

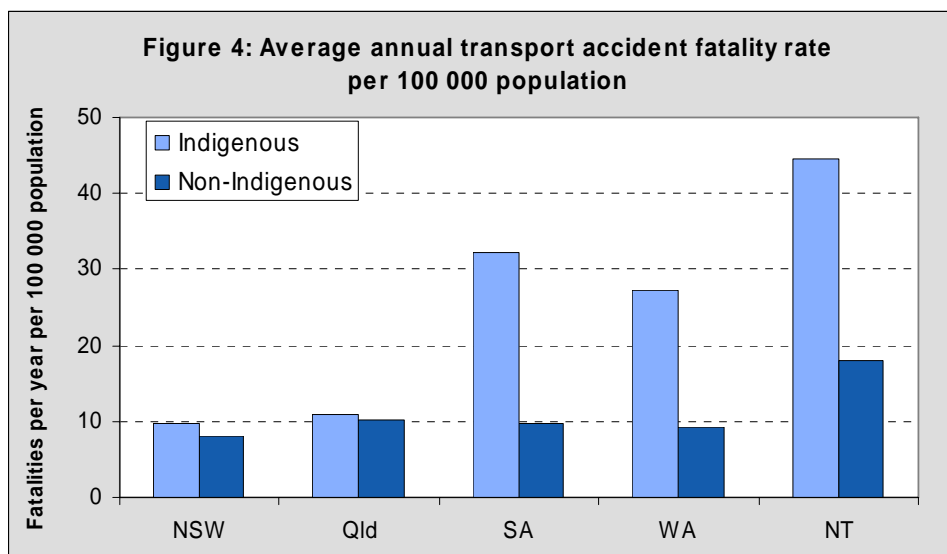
<sup>3</sup> Accessible from <http://www.atsb.gov.au/home.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> ABS Australian Demographic Statistics 3101.0

Figure 4 shows average annual rates for *total transport accident* deaths for Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations over the period 2001 – 2004.

Although this figure includes non-road transport deaths, it utilises more recent data than Figure 3.

The rates in Figure 4 are based on (i) Indigenous and non-Indigenous transport accident deaths during 2001 – 2004<sup>5</sup> and (ii) the Australian population and ‘experimental’ projections (high series) of the Indigenous population from ABS demographic statistics.



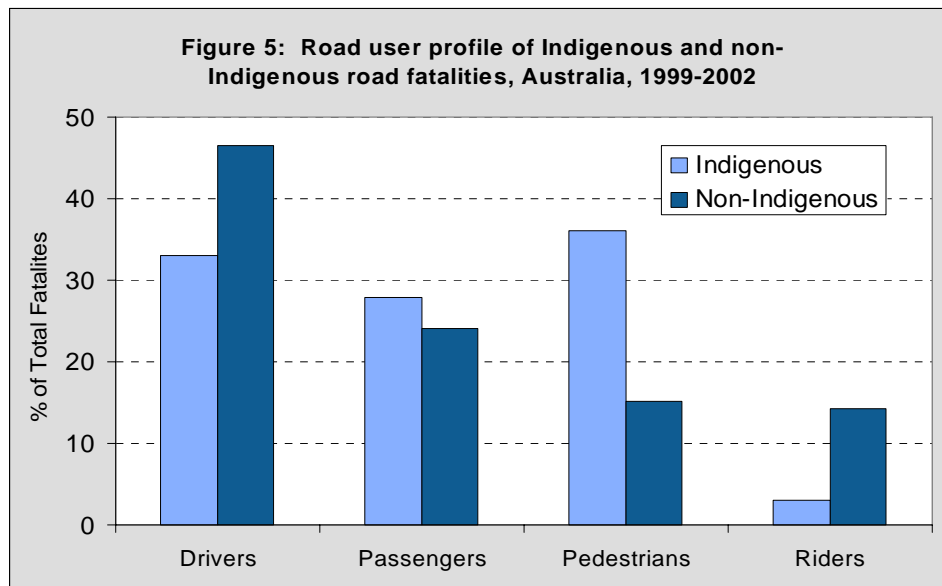
As can be seen in Figure 4, for jurisdictions with available published data, the rate of transport deaths for Indigenous people is significantly higher than for non-Indigenous people.

<sup>5</sup> ABS *Causes of Death 3303.0*

### 1.3 Road user profile

Figure 5 compares the road user profile of Indigenous fatalities between 1999 and 2002 with that of non-Indigenous fatalities. It is apparent that:

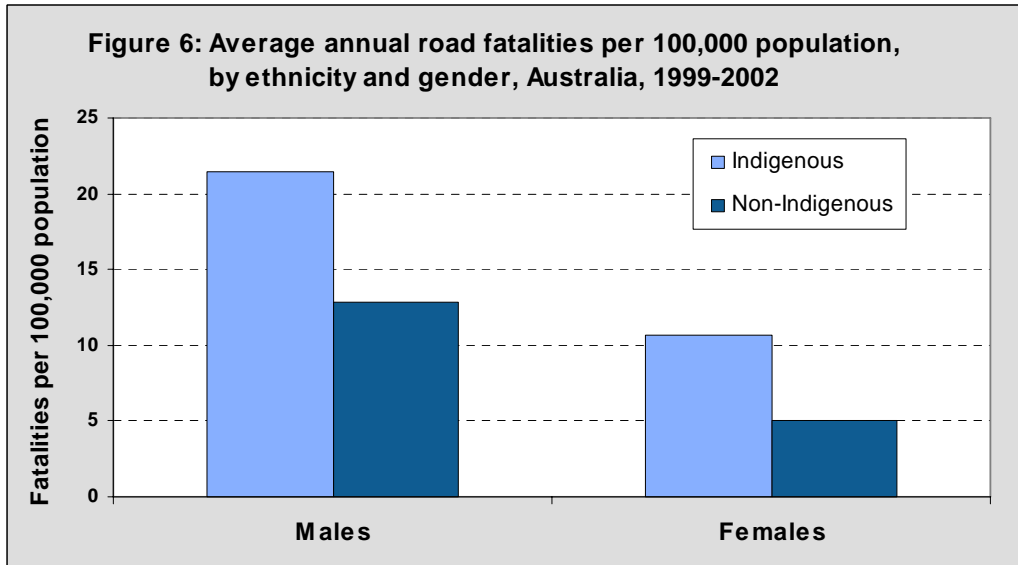
- pedestrians comprised a much larger proportion of Indigenous road deaths than of non-Indigenous deaths
- Indigenous road deaths featured a correspondingly-lower representation of drivers but not a lower representation of passengers (which perhaps reflects higher vehicle occupancy levels in the Indigenous population).



Source: ABS

### 1.4 Gender profile

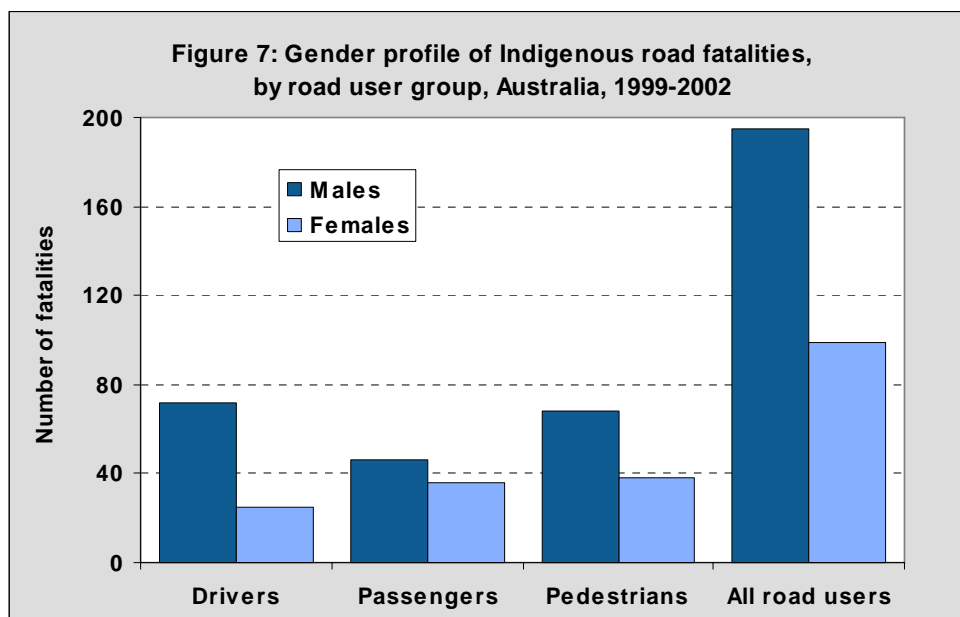
Figure 6 presents the average annual road fatality rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous males and females over the four calendar year period 1999 – 2002. It shows elevated rates for both Indigenous males and Indigenous females.



Source: ABS

Figure 7 presents the average gender profile over the four calendar year period 1999 – 2002 for each major road user group of Indigenous fatalities.

This gender profile is very similar to that observed for all Australian road fatalities, with females featuring more prominently among passenger fatalities than among driver and pedestrian fatalities.



Source: ABS



## 2. CRASH TYPES AND RISK FACTORS IN INDIGENOUS ROAD FATALITIES IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

This section presents a profile of crash types and risk factors for Indigenous road deaths in the Northern Territory over the four calendar year period 1998 – 2001.

This material derives from the latest available years of the ATSB’s Fatal Road Crash Database, compiled from coronial documents sourced Australia-wide each year.

The identification of the Indigenous status of road deaths included in the database is reliant on the extent to which Indigenous status is mentioned in the coronial documents. The present analysis has been restricted to the Northern Territory as it is only in that jurisdiction that coronial documentation for the years concerned provided reliable identification of Indigenous status. This section is based on a small number of database records (see Table 2). The percentages in the following graphs are indicative of possible relationships, rather than being definitive.

### 2.1 Crash types

As shown in Table 2, two crash types predominate in Indigenous road deaths in the Northern Territory - collisions with pedestrians and single-vehicle crashes.

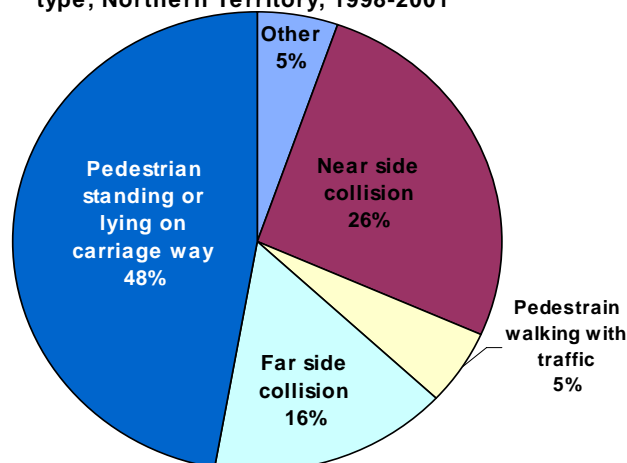
Table 2: Indigenous Fatalities, by Crash Type, Northern Territory, 1998-2001

Crash Type	Frequency	per cent
Single-Vehicle	44	51%
Multiple-Vehicle	4	5%
Pedestrian	38	44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: ATSB

Figure 8 below shows the collision type resulting in Indigenous pedestrian deaths in the Northern Territory. It can be seen that a large percentage of the fatalities involved people who had been standing or lying on the carriageway.

Figure 8: Indigenous pedestrian fatalities, by collision type, Northern Territory, 1998-2001



Source: ATSB

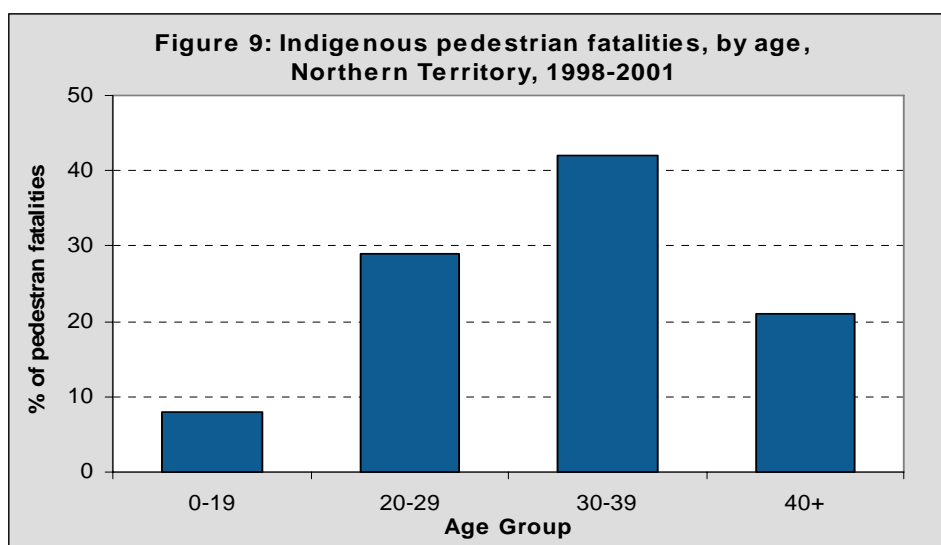
Table 3 shows that the majority of fatal collisions with Indigenous pedestrians in the Northern Territory between 1998 and 2001 occurred in urban locations.

Table 3: Location of Fatal Collisions with Indigenous Pedestrians, Northern Territory, 1998-2001

Location	Frequency	per cent
Urban	25	66%
Rural	12	31%
Unknown	1	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: ATSB

Figure 9 compares Indigenous pedestrian deaths, by age, for the Northern Territory between 1998 and 2001. It can be seen that Indigenous pedestrian fatalities in the Northern Territory mainly involved people aged 20 to 29 years and 30 to 39 years.



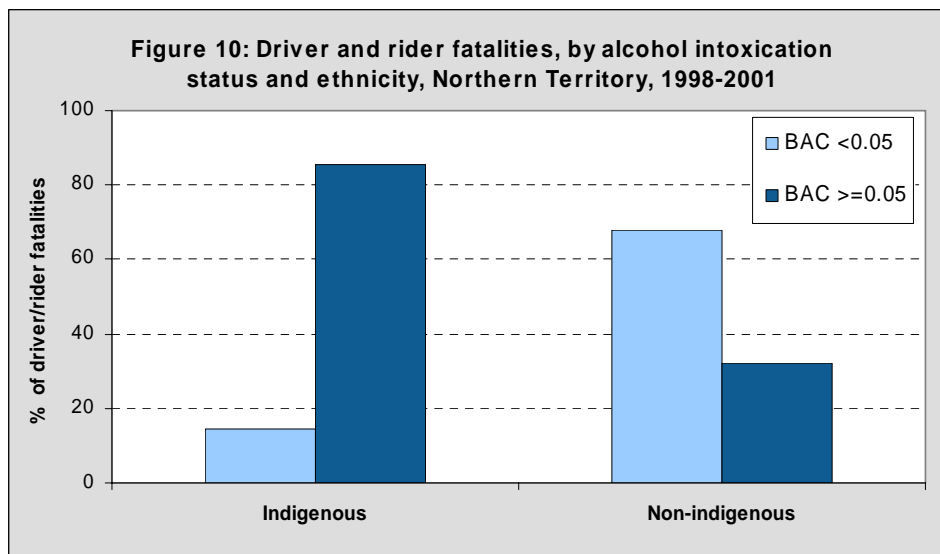
Source: ATSB

## 2.2 Behavioural risk factors

Alcohol intoxication is a dominant factor in road deaths among both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of the Northern Territory.

Figure 10 compares alcohol intoxication among fatally-injured Indigenous and non-Indigenous drivers and motorcycle riders in the Northern Territory. Figure 11 compares alcohol intoxication among fatally-injured Indigenous and non-Indigenous pedestrian fatalities. These Figures indicate that:

- alcohol intoxication was higher among Indigenous drivers, riders and pedestrians than among their non-Indigenous counterparts

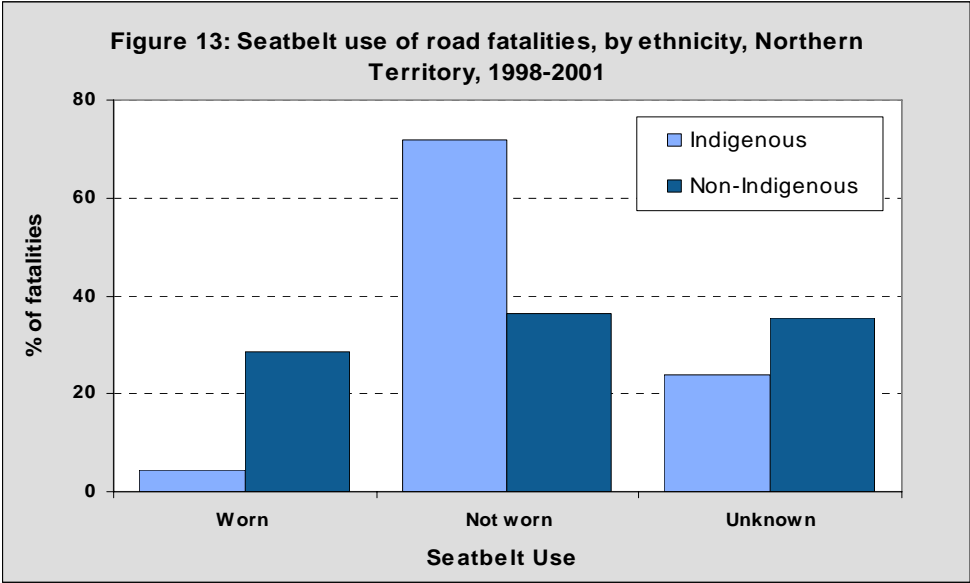


Source: ATSB



Source: ATSB

Figure 13 compares seatbelt use among fatally-injured Indigenous and non-Indigenous vehicle occupants in the Northern Territory. It is evident that a larger proportion of indigenous fatalities were not wearing seat belts.



Source: ATSB