

“STOP ACCIDENTS BEFORE THEY STOP YOU”: A GLIMPSE OF ROAD ACCIDENTS SCENARIO IN INDIA

RAJESH. R

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, NSS College Pandalam, Pathanamthitta District , Kerala - 689501

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ABSTRACT: *With a phenomenal increase in world population accompanied by the increasing needs, the resources available in the world are not becoming enough to cope up with time and space. For free movement and comfort the rush for registering vehicles is also on a high which leads to vehicle glut on the roads. Due to the failure of the transportation sector to accommodate the ever increasing vehicles on road the case of accidents is moving at a high speedy rate. The case is same all over the world, the relevance of which can be traced to the declaration of the UN General Assembly regarding the decade 2011-2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety. The present paper looks into the case of road accidents in India and Kerala in the recent years.*

Key Words: *Population, transportation, accidents.*

Introduction

Road accidents form a significant factor in taking an enormous toll on individuals and society as well as national economies. The cases of deaths due to road accidents remain unacceptably high all over the world with 1.35 million people dying each year. The matter is such significant that the United Nations has included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to halve deaths occurring on roads by 2020 around the world. Road traffic injuries are the eighth leading cause of deaths all over the world for all age groups. It has emerged as the number one cause of death for children and young people of 5-29 year age group. It is being reported that by 2030 road accidents will become the fifth leading cause of global deaths unless the governments adopt some drastic measures. In 2010 the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution calling for a Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020. It was in 2004 that the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank launched the *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention*. The World Report is highly helpful to provide necessary information regarding the risk factors leading to road traffic injuries and evidence on effective interventions and makes recommendations to countries on how to improve road safety. The considerable progress achieved implementing the recommendations were first reported in the *Global Status Report on Road Safety: Time for Action* (2009). The latest report published on December 2018 entitled *Global Status Report on Road Safety* re-emphasizes the need for strengthening legislative framework in all countries to reduce the menace.

The Indian scenario

Even though the road safety prospects of the world show signs of still existing threat to human life, the Indian scenario shows some difference. India has got the second largest road network in the world with 5,903,293 km of road network. For the first time in three consecutive years, i.e. 2011, 2012 and 2013, there was a decline in the number of road accidents, the number of persons killed and the number of persons injured in road accidents. The total number of occurrences of road accidents in the country declined from 4,97,686 in 2011 to 4,90,383 in 2012 to 4,86,476 in 2013. The number of persons killed in road accidents also declined from 1,42,485 in 2011 to 1,38,258 in 2012 to 1,37,572 in 2013. The number of persons injured in road accidents reduced both in absolute as well as relative terms. In 2012, as many as 5,09,667 had got injured in road accidents, in 2013, there were 4,94,893 persons injured. The number of persons injured in road accidents per lakh of population declined from 41.4 in 2012 to 39.6 in 2013.

2015, 2016 and 2017 also mark specific reduction in the case of accidents and deaths on roads. While in 2015 there were 501423 cases of accidents, in 2016 it got reduced to 480652 and further down to 464910 in 2017. However the case of deaths increased from 146133 to 150785 during 2015-2016. Later it declined to 147913 in 2017. It should be noted that the awareness programmes initiated by the motor vehicles department both at centre and state levels have turned to become fruitful over the years.

Table 1
Total road accidents 2011-17

Year	No. of accidents
2011	497686
2012	490383
2013	486476
2014	489400
2015	501423
2016	480652
2017	464910

Source : Annual Reports, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Govt. of India.

Both 2014 and 2015 showed an uprising trend in the case of occurrence of accidents on road, i.e. from 489400 in 2014 to 501423 in 2015. Marked improvement can be understood in the case of effect of the efforts made by government and private as well as NGO agencies.

Table 2
Total number of deaths 2011-17

Year	No. of deaths
2011	142485
2012	138258
2013	137572
2014	139671
2015	146133
2016	150785
2017	147913

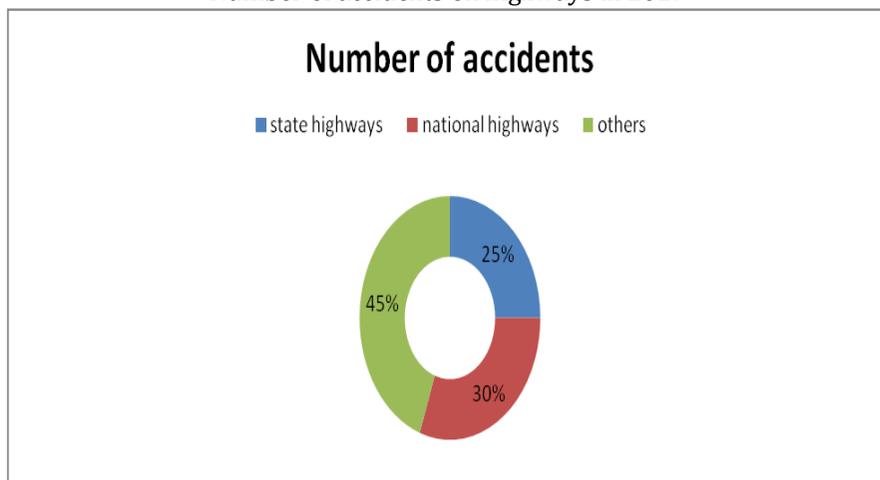
Source : Annual Reports, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Govt. of India.

2016 marked the worst year in case of number of deaths with 150785 people losing their lives on roads. However 2017 witnessed a good amount of reduction in the total deaths i.e. 147913.

Total accidents and deaths on highways

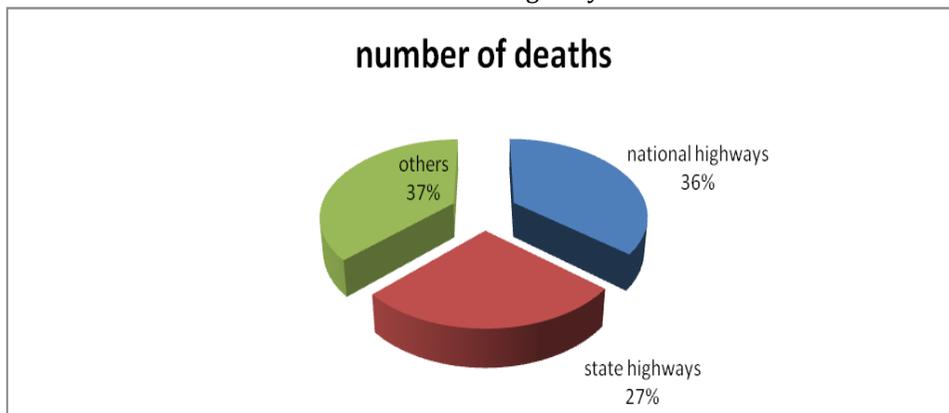
A major proportion of the people lose their lives on highways both state as well as national. While the fact remains that 40% of the total traffic in the country is carried by the National Highways, total number of accidents occurred on National Highways was 1,41,466 (30.4% in the total cases) in 2017. In the case of State Highways, the number was 1,16,158 (25% in the total cases) in 2017.

Figure1
Number of accidents on highways in 2017



Even though the share of other categories dominates the total number of accidents i.e. 45%, it is worth noticeable that the highways together constitute 55% of the total cases.

Figure 2
Number of deaths on highways in 2017



Even though the difference between total shares of accidents occurred on national highways and others in 2017 was 15%, while taking the case of total deaths occurred in 2017 there is only 1% difference between these two; i.e. 36% of deaths on national highways and 37% of deaths on others. Thus it can be generalized that the highways still remain vulnerable in the case of road safety.

Specific causes of road accidents in 2017

Various causes of road accidents can be laid down among which drunken driving, jumping red light, taking the wrong side of the road, over speeding, other causes etc.

Table 3
Causes of road accidents in 2017

Causes	Number of accidents	Number of deaths	Number of injured
Over speeding	3,27,448	98613	34,3083
Driving on wrong side	29,148	9,527	30,124
Drunken driving	14,071	4,776	11,776
Use of mobile phone	8,526	3,172	7,830
Jumping red light	6,324	1,826	5,997
No violation and not known	79,394	29,999	72,185

Source : Road Accidents in India-2017, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Govt. of India.

Over speeding on roads become the most significant cause behind the occurrence of road accidents in India. A total of 3, 27,448 accidents took place only due to the factor of the same. 98613 people lost their lives on roads only due to over speeding.

Accidents by road user category

A road user can be defined as a person who uses roads for the purpose of transportation and movement as a pedestrian or motorcyclist. Among the road user category two wheelers constituted the largest number of fatalities in 2017.

Table 4
Accidents by road user category

Road user category	Persons killed in 2017
Pedestrian	20,457
Bicycles	3,559
Two wheelers	48,746
Auto- Rickshaws	7,167
LMVs	26,869
Trucks, Lorries	17,158
Buses	9,069
Others	14,889

Source : Road Accidents in India-2017, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Govt. of India.

Road accidents mitigation measures taken by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Government of India.

There are multiple causes for the occurrence of road accidents and should therefore be met with multi-pronged measures. The road accidents measures initiated by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Government of India include road engineering designs, setting up of safety standards and also awareness programmes.

I. Road Engineering Measures

These will include

- Identification of accident black spots and rectification actions.
- Conduct of road safety audits in a regular manner.
- Installing crash barriers, particularly in hilly areas.
- Initiating training and capacity building programmes for road safety auditors.

II. IT enabled safety standards and measures

In order to match the vehicle standards with international levels of safety and standards, several measures were published by the Government at the stages of design, manufacture and operation of vehicles which can be pointed out as:

- Mandatory Anti-lock Brake System (ABS) for all types of M1 and M2 category vehicles.
- Fitting of speed governor in all M1 category vehicles.
- Additional safety measures like seat belt reminder, speed alert system etc.

III. Education and awareness initiatives

- In order to improve the driving competency of the drivers, the government has set up Model Institutes of Driving Training and Research (IDTR). 28 IDTRs are being sanctioned of which 16 have been functional, the remaining under construction.
- Driving Training Centres (DTC) are to be set up in each state in order to provide quality training to all levels of drivers and vehicle users.
- Road Safety Week is being observed every year in order to make aware the public about increasing road accidents and the need for safe driving habits.
- Increased amount has been sanctioned for research and development (R&D) activities in motor vehicle usage in order to promote the motto of safe driving practices and such research activities are passed on to the public through workshops, seminars and campaigns.

Conclusion

As the most important means of mobility in the country, road transportation is a vital component in the infrastructure development prospects of the government. At the same time it exposes people towards accidents and fatalities occurring on roads. There exists an adverse traffic environment which is conditioned by the increasing rate of urbanization and motorization. The case of road accidents is at its severity in the country, even though the rate of accidents is showing a declining trend, it is high time that the effectiveness of road safety policy be reviewed and appropriate measures be taken so that the roads in the country become safe means of transportation.

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