

CASE STUDY

ROAD ACCIDENTS AND LOCKDOWN IN INDIA

India is under nationwide lockdown from March 24, 2020 to mitigate the spread of the novel Covid-19 virus among the populace. This was deemed to be a necessary action by the government as the high density of population in India makes it a propitious victim to the virus attack and further escalate global statistics of people being affected by the pandemic. The lockdown barricaded the movement of almost 1.3 billion people in the country with stringent instructions to remain at home. No one would ever think about road mishaps during this lockdown period that has now surpassed two months. But statistics prove that rate of accidents in India has not scaled down despite the restrictions; however, there was a fall in absolute numbers.

Nearly, one-third of road accidents were the ones involving migrant workers walking back home owing to lack of livelihood options. Reports testify that India had 600 road crashes in the first two phases of lockdown (March 24th 2020 to May 3rd 2020). These figures turn our concerns to negligence of drivers, traffic awareness, road infrastructure etc.

- **Traffic Density**

1214 road crashes occur every **day in India**. Two wheelers account for 25% of total road crash **deaths**. 20 children under the age of 14 die every **day** due to road crashes in the country. 377 people die every **day**, equivalent to a jumbo jet crashing every **day**. **Second Leading** cause of death for males and females combined. At least 1,461 road crashes took place during the course of lockdown.

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27% of victims were migrant workers, 5% essential workers (police, doctors), 68% involved pedestrians, two-wheelers and three-wheelers categorized under Vulnerable Road Users or VRUs

Phase 3 recorded 60% deaths Phase 4 recorded 18% deaths out of the total.

Pedestrian rundown was the reason behind 9% deaths. Vehicle on Vehicle Collisions caused 43% of the deaths.

- **Causes**

India suffers the highest number of road crash deaths globally each year. The most common cause of road crashes in India is said to be speeding. During lockdown, people accustomed themselves to travel at higher speeds. Over speeding being the main causes of these crashes in 50% cases. Over speeding remained the driving cause behind over 1.5 lakh lives lost to road accidents in the country in 2018. Since the lockdown, over speeding caused over 15% of accidents.

Traveling in Heavy Motor Vehicles or HMs and Light Motor Vehicle-Transport or LMV-TR commercial vehicles, and in mass fatality crashes involving state organized buses or fatigue due to continuous driving on tenuous routes was another factor responsible for death of migrants.

In Karnataka, the driver of a mango loaded lorry created partition with planks in his lorry to accommodate more people. Migrant workers walk, cycle, or travel packed together in the back of trucks in hundreds on trucks in highways.

Close to 1,000 Shramik specials had ferried over 10 lakh migrants around the country. But that seemingly large number is still a drop in the ocean – the Economic Survey of India 2016-17 estimated the size of the migrant workforce in the country at over 10 crore. 30 percent of these victims were migrants travelling back home.

There has been a dip in the absolute number of road crash fatalities during lockdown due to suspension of public transport and restrictions on general mobility; the rate of deaths in road crashes has remained unchanged.

● **Travel Guidelines**

The Ministry of Road Transport has issued guidelines to travel for different stakeholders.

For Citizens: To minimize travel numbers, public may be advised through appropriate means to avoid the same if it is not unavoidable and a facility of extending refund be considered where passengers have done their bookings.

For Governments of States: it is requested that all necessary steps may be undertaken in the Public Transport Vehicles to ensure sanitation of seats, handles & bars. The hygiene and sanitation may please be stepped up at all the Bus Terminals and the display of public health messages may be ensured on public transport vehicles, Bus Terminals and the Bus Stops. Many states in India sealed their borders first and then unlocked them in a hasty manner to prevent inter-state transmission of virus.

● **Road Infrastructure**

The lockdown has been utilized as an opportunity by many state governments have started working on the construction work for roads which normally, becomes difficult due to heavy traffic. Road- safety audits can also be taken place to focus on road infrastructure.

● Lack of Media Coverage for Road Safety

Indian Media has largely failed to cover Traffic rules for ensuring safety of the citizens. The Motor Vehicle (Amendment Act) 2019 was only covered widely by the media for its high amount of fine. The news headlines covered articles which had the lines

“Since the new Motor Vehicle Act came into existence on September 1, violators have to shell out hefty fines if they're caught. Two scooter drivers and an auto driver were fined Rs 23,000, Rs 24,000 and Rs 32,500 respectively for [violating several rules](#). The two men riding two-wheelers were fined for not wearing helmets and not carrying documents while an auto driver was challaned for jumping a red light. Some drivers have gone to such an extent that they ended up burning down their vehicles after getting challenged with huge fines. Some fines were more than the value of their vehicles.”

While it was appreciated, that the media covered the new act, bringing its various rules and regulations to the wider public. However, the media failed to even take a look at the figures of how many Indians were dying because of traffic accidents. The only thing coverage focused on was the outrage over such hefty fines. But no one acknowledged the need of such high amount could act as possible deterrent making people follow traffic rules seriously. The police during the lockdown adopted some very creative measures to spread information about Covid-19. This was covered by the media. But the traffic police have been constantly working in creative manner to bring awareness regarding rules and regulations. They conduct mock drills in schools and colleges, they even engage with people over twitter which has a high reach. The media however, has failed to cover these efforts by the traffic policemen.

● Solutions

1. Governments should also prioritize road safety along with economic stimulus measures while notifying SOPs for inter-state movement of people, since a large number of crashes have involved vehicles ferrying people across states.
2. Enforcement of Good Samaritan law

3. Third phase of the lockdown is a golden opportunity for States to fix engineering faults in our roads and institute mechanisms for electronic enforcement so that when things become normal, we can keep road fatalities low.
4. Changes to segregate pedestrian traffic from fast moving vehicles
5. Supreme Court Order not to take fee from workers
6. Move from the fatalistic attitude conveyed by 'accident' to prevent this needless loss of lives. Road safety for pedestrians, motorcyclists, and cyclists needs to be prioritized to ensure that the youth of our country do not face untimely death.

● Statistics

Almost 57% of the deaths were of people driving during the lockdown and the most common causal factor across these crashes was speeding.

As per data compiled by non-profit organization, SaveLIFE Foundation, India has recorded more than 600 road crashes during the first five weeks of the nationwide lockdown--between March 24 and May 3. Over 100 deaths in across 9 states--Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Assam, Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Punjab and Tamil Nadu.

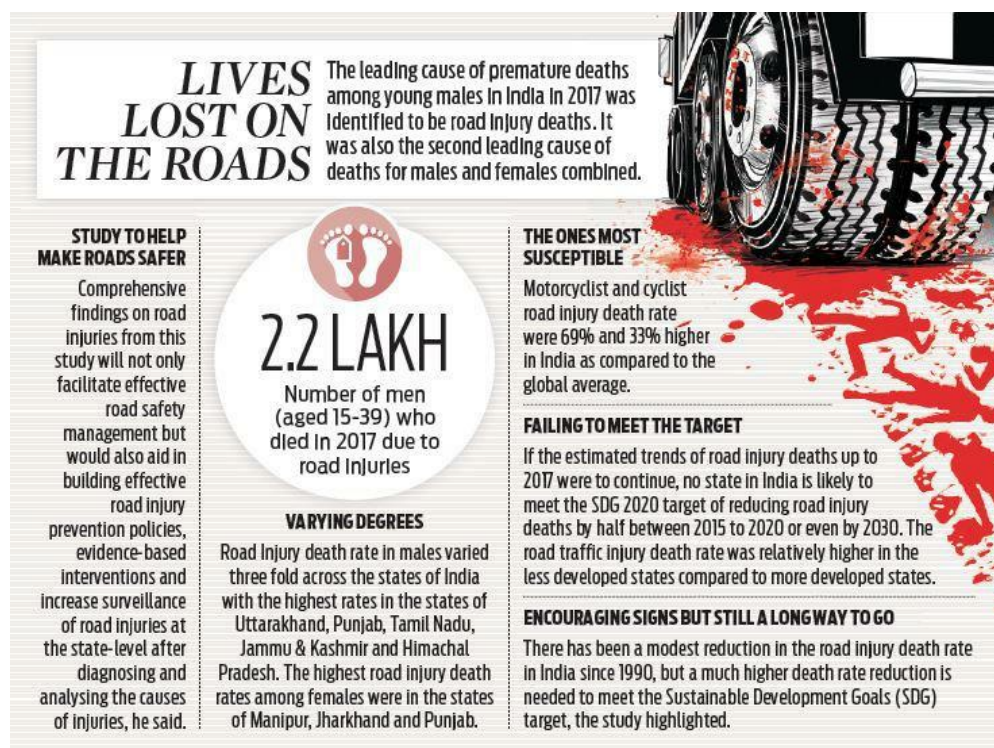
Almost 57% of the deaths were of people driving during the lockdown and the most common causal factor across these crashes was speeding, the organization said. The rest of the road crash deaths were of essential workers such as doctors, among others who were travelling either from or to their place of work.

"India suffers the highest number of road crash deaths globally each year .Though there will be a dip in that number this year due to the lockdown, 140 deaths in over 600 crashes goes to show gains achieved will be lost as soon as things go back to normal .The third phase of the lockdown is a golden opportunity for states to fix engineering faults in our roads and institute mechanisms for electronic enforcements." Piyush Tewari, Founder and CEO, SaveLIFE Foundation said. India is famous for poor road safety and records one of the highest cases of road accidents every year.

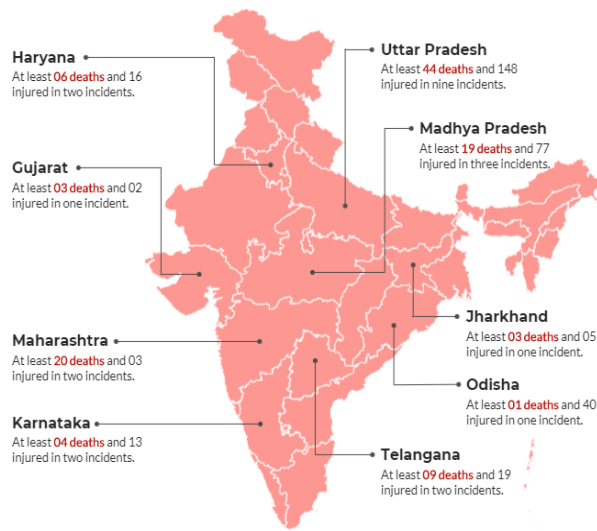
While there has been a dip in the absolute number of road crash fatalities during lockdown due to suspension of public transport and general mobility, the rate of deaths in road crashes has remained unchanged, which is emblematic of the state of Indian roads amid stringent restrictions. India is one of the countries with the highest number of road accident-related

deaths. There were 1, 51,417 deaths due to road accidents in 2018, an increase of 2.3% from 2017, according to road ministry data. An average, India records one death for every four road accidents and this has not changed even during the lockdown as almost 700 lives have been claimed by road accidents in India ever since the lockdown came into effect. And unfortunately, most of the people who lost their lives in such incidents were migrant workers and essential service providers. As a matter of fact, lockdown 4.0, because of increased mobility and lesser travelling restrictions, has recorded more road accidents than pre-lockdown scenario.

India's record with high number of migrant workers and other people due to lack of awareness regarding traffic safety and rules, and incompetent handling of the situation by the government points towards the loopholes in the system that should be fixed immediately. India has been dealing with road accidents since a long time, but the current situation and scenario leave bare any scope of improvement. It also brings to one's eyes the ability of various departments and ministries ensured to maintain conditions that will aid us in attaining vision zero. Adding to this, the failure of the mass media to cover basic road safety conversations with the public should be subject to outrage over its incompetency and lack of preparedness. As India moves into the phase of "unlock", with states resuming interstate travel sooner or later, the state governments and central government should prepare guidelines in advance for safe travel of citizens and migrants alike. This should be done so that people who die in road accidents do not end up being numbers on a statistical graph.



Migrant Workers **Killed** in Accidents



Note: The figures are based on accidents that were reported in the national media and, therefore, the numbers are not exhaustive and the actual death toll could be higher.
Source: Media Reports

Questions

- (1) Prepare a draft of 'Traffic guidelines for restricted travel during pandemic' that should be distributed among the public for ensuring safety of everyone.
- (2) What, according to you, are the reasons for the failure faced by the government in providing safe transport by road to migrant workers, while also ensuring containment of the virus?
- (3) Analyze the reasons for the high number of casualties of migrant workers on road during the lockdown period.
- (4) What conclusion do you draw from all the statistics provided?

(5) Which area should the government put its immediate attention into?

Sources

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