



## Editorial

# Road Traffic Accidents: An Emerging Public Health Threat in Bangladesh

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With the rise of economic status in Bangladesh, vehicle volume and unfortunately the number of road traffic accident (RTA) fatalities have become the highest public health problem in the country and the majority of these road crashes are assumed to be caused by human error. It is important to drive carefully and follow all traffic laws, although law with machine and killing on the road is a big and complex issue now-a-days.

Recently, two students were killed under speeding wheels as the driver of one of the buses ploughed into a crowd while competing with another bus of the same company on Airport Road Dhaka last on July 29, 2018. This competition kills everyday around 21 people and injures 45 people as per a report from the Daily Star February 15, 2017<sup>1</sup>.

From different statistics, as in 2015 it is countable as 8,642 were killed and 21,855 injured in 6,581 road crashes. In 2016, 4,312 road crashes left 6,055 dead and 15,918 injured. The number of road crashes in 2016 was 34.48 per cent lesser than that of 2015. But in 2017, around 7,397 people were killed and 16,193 injured in 4,979 road accidents. Compared with 2016's statistics, road accidents increased by 15.5 percent, death increased by 22.2 percent and number of injuries have increased by about 2 percent in last year from different reported studies. Hence, the roads in Bangladesh have become rising deadly.

According to the latest WHO data published in 2017 on road traffic accidents, deaths in Bangladesh reached 20,660 or 2.62% of total deaths. Drivers without valid driving licenses have remained a long-standing concern for Bangladeshi travelers and safe road campaigners<sup>2</sup>.

Latest data from Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) revealed that, there are over 3.5 million registered vehicles in the country, but valid driving licenses have been issued to only 2.6 million drivers. The authorities however do not have any information on how many valid driving license holders have not renewed their licenses after expiry.

Additionally, Bangladesh Passenger Welfare Association (BPWA), a campaigner for safe roads, claims that there are around 1.5 million illegal vehicles in addition to registered vehicles, which means there could be over 2.4 million legal and

illegal vehicles being driven by unqualified drivers who are putting their own lives along with those of a large number of people at risk.

Using police records as reference, RTA data shows that on average, 3,000 road accidents take place in Bangladesh annually, killing around 2,700 people and injuring about 2,400. The estimated economic loss from these accidents reaches Taka 40,000 crore annually, which is 2% to 3% of Bangladesh's GDP (2015)<sup>3</sup>.

### Contributing Factors:

The road accidents are happening most often due to the reckless and speedy driving of the vehicles, not obeying or following traffic rules, the attitudes of the "right of the mighty" bigger vehicles toward the smaller vehicles, overburdened or overcapacity carrying of public, high demand of earning, corruption and the culture of no responsibility by driver, vehicle owner or law and order authority; poor maintenance of the vehicles, drunken and driving, driver fatigue and above all the terrible condition of the already choked roads with every inch invaded by unauthorized persons and properties<sup>4</sup>. Fatigability of driver is a very dangerous condition created when a person is suffering symptoms of fatigue while driving, often resulting from the hypnotic effect especially during night time driving either falling asleep at the wheel or so exhausted to make serious and fatal driving errors<sup>5</sup>.

High earning target is another contributing factor, one driver has to earn certain amount of money to pay the bus owner rent, paying his assistants, purchasing fuel and food. In addition "there is also extortion by the police on the roads, further adding to our misery." However, the debilitating traffic jam in Dhaka City and Highways robs him a considerable time of his daily working hours, which in turn cuts down his income. So to compensate these challenges a driver is compelled to speedy driving.

### Corruption:

Massive irregularities and corruption triumph in the road transport system of Bangladesh. The role of all stakeholders including the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) is under question. The trade unions of the transport sector and bus & truck terminals are beyond the control of BRTA. These

were revealed in a study of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). The study showed that a service recipient has to pay up to Taka 50,000 as bribe during registration depending upon the type and value of the vehicle. In Dhaka Metropolitan Area, a bus owner has to pay bribe of Taka 10,000 to Taka 3,00,000 as entry fee for each bus. To get route permit and transfer of vehicle ownership documents, vehicle owners have to pay bribe up to Taka 20,000 to BRTA personnel and brokers. The survey revealed that about 61% drivers got driving license without appearing driving test. Bribe paid for driving license varies from Taka 1000 to Taka 7,000 depending on the type of the license<sup>6</sup>. The study also showed that 54% drivers are running vehicles with their expired driving licenses. The study also mentioned some other causes that play important role for RTA like lack of public awareness, no body become responsible for any causality, defective roads and haphazard pedestrian movement on and around the road.

#### Road Safety Countermeasures:

It is possible to significantly reduce the number of road accidents and casualties by implementing an effective and coordinated safety policy and actions which require significant improvements in the political commitment in relevant sectors viz. better enforcement, better roads, enhanced vehicle safety standards, improved and extensive public education and safety related awareness programs. It is argued that priorities be placed on the principles like traffic segregation to provide facilities and road space for the most vulnerable users particularly pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles, and to force correct road user behavior via channelization, speed reduction measures, etc.

#### Prevention and Control:

- a. Strong political commitment: it is not easy to improve the situation without strong political commitment.
- b. Provision of fixation of responsibility of every causality with due compensation.
- c. Proper insurance coverage of passengers and other victims of RTA.
- d. Proper implementation of legislation: provision of law is not the solution without strict implementation.
- e. Improvement of Post-Crash Care.

#### Measures:

- a. Number of trauma centre with modern facilities need to increase.

- b. Research, Education and Awareness Development Measures: continuous research on RTA and taking action on the guideline of the findings of research will help to improve the situation.

#### Conclusion:

As citizens, we too have a role to play in ensuring road safety. While travelling in public transports, passengers should protest and stop speeding and reckless driving by bus and taxi drivers. Owners of motor vehicles should ensure that employed drivers have genuine driving licenses, are properly trained and drive responsibly. Road safety education to pedestrians, especially children, within the communities by community leaders is also a good way to promote road safety. The traffic police department has a crucial role to play in identifying and holding accountable reckless driving, speeding and unstable or overloaded vehicles.

For a developing country like Bangladesh, allowing its citizen to perish to road accidents is very much tragic. Necessary measures should be taken immediately for its prevention.

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