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## Road accidents or crashes? Time to wake up

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Road traffic crashes have emerged as an important public health issue that needs to be tackled by a multi-disciplinary approach. The trend in road crashes injuries and death is becoming alarming in middle and low-income countries like Bangladesh. The number of fatal and disabling road crashes happening is increasing day by day and is a real public health challenge for all the concerned agencies to prevent. The approach to implementing the rules and regulations available to prevent road accidents is often ineffective and unenthusiastic.

Awareness creation, strict enforcement of road transport law, and strengthening of the existing ACT (RTA- 2018) are the need of the hour to prevent this public health catastrophe. Additionally, it is one of the biggest public health and injury prevention problems in the world. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the victims are completely healthy before the accident. Road crashes are one of the most hazardous global threats to human health and life.

According to the World Health Organization's Global Status Report on Traffic Safety 2018, an average of 1.35 million people die on the roads each year, and an average of 50 million people are injured worldwide. The survey found that road crashes are the 8th leading cause of death in the world; moreover, it is the leading cause of death, especially among the 5-29-year-olds. Among these deaths around 90% occur in low- and middle-income countries. Even in the context of Bangladesh, many people are being injured and killed in road crashes every day.

According to the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), on an average of at least 2,000 people are killed by road crashes in Bangladesh every year. At least 10,000 people were crippled and 20,000 to 30,000 people were injured in these accidents. According to the World Bank, and the World Health Organization (WHO) respectively 12,000 and about 20,000 people die every year in road crashes.

Following BUET's Accident Research Institute (ARI) and the Nirapad Sarak Chai (NiSCha) - a movement for safe roads, about 12,000 people are slaughtered by road crashes each year. Although the number of deaths varies according to the statistics of different organizations, at least 10 to 12 thousand people die in road crashes on average every year. Last year, even under the COVID-19 situation around 4,996 people were killed and 5,075 injured in road crashes in Bangladesh.

Traffic collisions cause massive economic and social impacts in addition to injuries, disability, and deaths. Road crashes cost the global economy 3% of GDP, while in low- and middle-income countries, they cost up to 5% of GDP. A poor safety record can discourage private investments, as global corporations are worried about staff safety and product distribution efficiency as well.

We commonly call these events 'accidents', suggesting unwittingly they are not amenable to prevention and amelioration. Even the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (target 3.6) aim to halve the global traffic deaths and injuries, calling them 'accidents'. However, traffic crashes are not accidents; they are preventable. By framing preventable traffic deaths and injuries as 'accidents', society engages in a collective shrug, concluding it is not a public health priority.

A large body of evidence demonstrates public health interventions work regarding this issue, and they have worked with dramatic effect in reducing fatalities and injuries in most high-income countries whereas low- and middle-income countries bear the burden due to the dizzying assortment of vehicles like cars, buses, trucks, motorcycles, bicycles, pedestrians, and even animals clog the streets. There are minimal, if any, barriers separating traffic on the unlit roads. Without seatbelts, proper child restraint system, or helmets, commuters pack into unstable truck beds, ride several deep on motorcycles, and sit on bicycle handlebars. Despite these issues, the consequence should not be acknowledged as an 'accident'.

It would be an immense mistake to perceive crash fatalities in this light. Evidence-based law improvisation can significantly reduce traffic-related injuries and deaths. Human behaviour is indeed significant. Uncontrolled speeding, driving under the influence of the drug, and alcohol, and improper usage of helmets, seat belts, and child restraints are among the five behavioural risk factors pin down by the World Health Organization (WHO). Even behavioural hazards, however, can be altered with the help of legislation and technology. Laws restricting risky practices are effective, especially when they have enforced what the World Health Organization refers to as "best practice" law.

These public health risks can be avoided, but only if the government, citizens, and the media mutually commit to allocating resources, implementing policies, publicity campaigns, and deploying technology that research has shown to be effective internationally. To do so the first step is to acknowledge that these incidents are not accidents, but rather the foreseeable result of our collective failure to prioritize road safety.

Lately, the Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) has begun working on road safety issues and has taken initiatives to sensitize the responsible personnel from the ministry, and the relevant departments to amend the Road Transport Act-2018. In continuation, the ministry of Road Transport and Bridges, Bangladesh is already working on the recommendations for the ACT which DAM has submitted.

DAM- Health Sector's project "Advocacy for Stronger Road Safety Legislation in Bangladesh" has been celebrating different national and international days since last two years including National Road Safety Day- 2021, World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims-2021, and UN Global Road Safety Week-2021 through different social media campaigns, road decorations, human chains, discussion meetings with road safety-relevant stakeholders, and candlelight ceremonies as well to educate people about the road safety issues as a preventable health concern.

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