



## Unraveling Silent Pandemic of Road Accidents

This editorial is based on [“Steering road safety in India back onto the right lane”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 20/11/2023. It discusses the road safety crisis in India and the need for immediate interventions to address the issue.

**For Prelims:** [Road Accidents in India-2022](#), Sundar Committee, [UN's Second Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030](#), [Disability-adjusted life years \(DALYs\)](#)

**For Mains:** Road Accidents in India: stats, causes and impacts; Sundar Committee Recommendations and Way Forward

India's road network is a paradoxical situation. On one hand, it presents a significant and expanding opportunity for commuting, connecting, transporting, and traveling, which is in tandem with the country's modernization and remarkable economic growth. However, like in many other nations, India's roads also pose a silent but deadly pandemic.

### How Fatal are the Road Accidents in India?

- As per the report on [Road Accidents in India-2022](#) published by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, a total of **4,61,312 road accidents have been reported** by States and Union Territories (UTs) during the calendar year 2022, which **claimed 1,68,491 lives** and caused injuries to 4,43,366 persons.
  - This marks an **increase of 11.9% in accidents, 9.4% in fatalities, and 15.3% in injuries** compared to the previous year (2021).
- According to another data published by the WHO, each year, a staggering **3,00,000 people are estimated to be killed on the road** in India.
  - That is equivalent to more than **34 people every hour of every day**. And that is a conservative estimate.
  - The number of people suffering life-altering injuries in road crashes is exponentially higher even than that.
- Road safety is a global problem, with 1.3 million people killed in road crashes every year. But almost **one in every four road deaths around the world takes place in India**.

### What are the Primary Reasons Behind Road Accidents in India?

- **Overspeeding:** Drivers exceeding the prescribed speed limits pose a significant risk. Lack of awareness regarding speed limits and inadequate enforcement contribute to this problem.
  - For example, according to the Road Accidents in India-2022 report, **over-speeding continued to remain the most major cause accounting for 72.3% of all accidents** across India and over two-third of all deaths and injuries.

- **Drunk Driving:** Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs impairs judgment and coordination.
  - According to the Road Accidents in India-2022 report, drunk driving accounted for 2.2% of road accidents in India in 2022.
- **Distracted Driving:** Using mobile phones, eating, or engaging in other activities while driving diverts attention and increases the likelihood of accidents.
  - A survey by IIT Bombay highlighted that about 60% of drivers use phones while driving among all the participants in the study.
- **Poor Infrastructure and Road Design:** The quality of infrastructure and road design plays a crucial role in road safety. In India, several factors contribute to accidents, such as **potholes, poorly marked lanes, inadequate road signs, insufficient lighting**, and lack of pedestrian facilities.
- **Extreme Weather Conditions:** Severe weather conditions also have a tendency to heighten the likelihood of accidents. **Dense fog, excessive rainfall, strong winds, and similar conditions make driving more challenging**, which can result in horrifying accidents if drivers fail to exercise extra caution.
- **Mechanical Failures:** Apart from human errors and adverse weather conditions, one of the major causes of road accidents is due to vehicle breakdowns or malfunctions. **Faulty brakes, tires, steering, lights, or other components** can compromise the safety and performance of the vehicle.
- **Non-Compliance with Traffic Rules and Regulations:** The lack of adherence to traffic rules and regulations significantly contributes to road accidents.
  - **Non-Use of Seat Belts and Helmets:** Failure to wear seat belts and helmets increases the risk of severe injuries and fatalities.
    - At least eight out of every 10 car occupants (nearly 83%) killed in accidents across India in 2021 were not wearing seatbelts, according to a report of the Union road transport ministry.
  - **Violation of Traffic Signals:** Disregarding traffic signals, overtaking at intersections, and jumping red lights pose serious risks.
    - According to a report, out of the total road accidents in 2020, 919 were caused by jumping of traffic signal which killed 476 people.
  - **Overloading of Vehicles:** Overloaded commercial vehicles **compromise stability and manoeuvrability, leading to accidents.**
    - In 2020, at least 10,000 people were killed and 25,000 were injured by overloaded trucks on National Highways in India..
- **Poor Enforcement and Governance:** The effectiveness of traffic enforcement and governance has a significant impact on road safety.
  - **Inadequate Traffic Police Presence:** Insufficient traffic police officers on the roads hinder enforcement efforts. Increasing the number of traffic police personnel and their visibility can enhance enforcement.
    - India has a little over 72,000 traffic police to manage 20 crore vehicles.
  - **Corruption and Bribery:** Corruption among traffic police personnel undermines road safety efforts.
    - According to [Transparency International](#), India ranked 85th out of 180 countries in the **Corruption Perceptions Index** in 2022.
  - **Low Awareness:** According to a 2019-20 study by SaveLIFE, **37.8% people said they thought wearing seat belts is not mandatory for passengers in the rear seat. While the law mandates the use of rear seat belts, only 27.7% of the respondents were aware of the law.**

## What are the Impacts of Road Accidents in India?

- **Injuries and Disabilities:** Road accidents can cause serious **physical injuries and disabilities, such as fractures, burns, amputations, spinal cord injuries, and brain injuries.** These can affect the quality of life and well-being of the victims and their families.
  - According to the WHO, road traffic injuries are the leading cause of **disability-adjusted life years (DALYs)** lost among 15-29 year olds in India.
- **Psychological Trauma and Stress:** Road accidents can also cause psychological trauma and

stress, such as **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**, anxiety, depression, and grief. These can affect the mental health and emotional stability of the victims and their families.

- **Death and Loss of Loved Ones:** Road accidents can result in death and loss of loved ones, which can have devastating and irreversible consequences for the victims and their families.
- **Social Inequality and Exclusion:** Road accidents can exacerbate social inequality and exclusion, as they **disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable groups, such as pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, and public transport users**. These groups often lack access to safe and affordable transportation, health care, and social protection.
  - **Vulnerable road users**, who include pedestrians, cyclists and the riders of two-wheelers, account for **almost three quarters of road deaths** in India.
- **Loss of Productivity and Income:** Road accidents can cause **loss of productivity and income**, as they affect the ability and availability of the workforce, and reduce the earning potential and savings of the victims and their families.
  - In India, road crashes are estimated to cost between **5% and 7% of national GDP**.
- **Increase in Health Care and Legal Costs:** Road accidents can also increase the health care and legal costs, as they require medical treatment, rehabilitation, compensation, and litigation. These can impose a **heavy burden on the public and private sectors**, and the victims and their families.
  - According to a study commissioned by the road transport and highways ministry, the average socio-economic cost of a road accident in India in 2018 was:
    - Death: Rs 91 lakh
    - Grievous injuries: Rs 3.6 lakh

## What should be done to Address the Silent Pandemic of Road Accidents?

- **Enforcement of Seatbelt and Helmet Use:**
  - A WHO report estimated: "Wearing a seat-belt reduces the risk of death among drivers and front seat occupants by 45-50%, and the risk of death and serious injuries among rear seat occupants by 25%."
- **Awareness Campaigns:**
  - Launch large-scale public awareness campaigns, such as the UN's #MakeASafetyStatement, to educate the public about the importance of road safety.
- **Speed Limit Enforcement and Anti-Drink Driving Measures:**
  - Implement measures to reduce speeding, including enhanced traffic management systems and monitoring.
  - Zero tolerance for drink-driving, with strict penalties for offenders.
- **Infrastructure Improvement:**
  - Enhance road infrastructure to ensure safe conditions, addressing issues that contribute to accidents.
  - Invest in ongoing government programs for rapid improvements in road safety.
- **Focus on Vulnerable Road Users:**
  - Prioritize the safety of vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and two-wheeler riders, who account for a significant portion of road deaths.
  - Develop infrastructure and awareness programs specifically tailored to protect these users.
- **International Best Practices:**
  - Study and adapt successful international road safety practices to the specific needs and circumstances of India.
    - The **Netherlands' Sustainable Safety vision** focuses on preventing crashes and reducing crash severity by creating a safe road system.
      - It is based on **five principles**: functionality, homogeneity, predictability, forgiveness, and state awareness.
      - Some of the measures implemented under this vision are road classification, roundabouts, bicycle paths, and traffic calming.
    - Japan has achieved a remarkable reduction in road traffic deaths, from 16,765 in 1990 to 3,215 in 2019.
      - It has implemented various measures, such as **strict enforcement of traffic laws, improvement of road infrastructure, promotion of seat belt and helmet use**, and introduction of advanced safety technologies in vehicles.

- Japan also has a comprehensive **road safety education system**, which covers all stages of life, from preschool to senior citizens.

- **Implementation of Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019:**

- Ensure full implementation of the [Motor Vehicles \(Amendment\) Act, 2019](#), which includes measures to enhance road safety.

- **Emergency Care Services:**

- Improve access to high-quality emergency care services and proper after-care for road crash victims.
- Address regional disparities in emergency care to ensure uniform survival chances across different states.

- **Public-Private Collaboration:**

- Encourage collaboration between the public and private sectors to develop and implement innovative solutions for road safety.
- Support initiatives by private sector companies that contribute to improving road safety. Some of the initiatives are:
  - Drive Safe India campaign by Maruti Suzuki
  - Drive Safe, Drive Smart campaign by Mahindra & Mahindra

- **Align with Global Initiatives:**

- Align with global initiatives, such as the [UN's Second Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030](#), to adopt a comprehensive safe-system approach.

## Sundar Committee Recommendations on Road Safety

- Creation of the **National Road Safety & Traffic Management Board**, an apex body at the national level to promote road safety and traffic management in the country, to be constituted through an Act of the Parliament with members and experts drawn from various fields including road engineering, automobile engineering, traffic laws, medical care, etc.
- Establishment of **State Road Safety & Traffic Management Boards** in each state and union territory, with similar functions and powers as the national board, to coordinate with the state governments and local authorities on road safety and traffic management issues.
- Development of a **National Road Safety Plan with specific targets, strategies, and action plans for reducing road accidents and fatalities**, and enhancing road safety and traffic management.
- Improvement of post-accident care and trauma management, and **establishment of a national road accident database and information system**, with standardized formats and protocols for data collection, analysis, and dissemination.
- To provide flow of funds, the Committee has suggested **earmarking of 1% of total proceeds of cess on diesel and petrol** for Road Safety Fund.
- The Committee has also dwelt upon other various issues like decriminalization of road accidents, insurance and **dedicated highway police**, etc.

Based on the recommendations of the Sundar Committee, the Union Cabinet approved the **National Road Safety Policy** in 2010.

### **Drishti Mains Question:**

Examine the multifaceted challenges associated with road accidents in India and suggest comprehensive strategies that the government should adopt to address the silent pandemic of road accidents.