

IMPACT OF ROAD CRASHES ON ADOLESCENTS

CHAPTER 7

The most common cause of death among children is unintentional injury, and the most common cause of unintentional injury is related to road crashes³⁶. Children in India are exposed to the risk of road crashes on multiple occasions while commuting to schools- in private vehicles, in public transport vehicles, and as pedestrians. In 2018, 23 school children died when their school bus fell into a deep gorge in Nurpur in Himachal Pradesh. A similar crash occurred on 5th August 2019, where 10 children were killed when their school bus fell into a gorge in Tehri Garhwal

Since 2008, over 55,000 children have lost their lives in road crashes in India and a large majority of these are adolescents. Every day around 42 children including 31 adolescents die in road crashes in India with a 10% contribution to the total road crash deaths. Most of these deaths happen near schools and colleges.

To understand the qualitative aspects of the financial, social and psychological impact of road fatalities/ injuries on adolescents, In-Depth Interviews (IDI) were conducted with adolescents.

IDIs were conducted among adolescents (aged between 14-18 years) across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra. Overall 8 adolescents were selected and interviewed. Respondents were probed on different aspects of the crash and its impact on them as an individual as well as the impact on their household.

7.1. IMPACT ON ADOLESCENTS AS INDIVIDUALS

Road Crashes devastate families. Other than financially draining the family and tearing apart the familial fabric, road crashes also take a toll on the mental health of family members. Many studies have pointed out that "Psychiatric symptoms and disorder are frequent after road crash injury. Post-traumatic symptoms are common and disabling." (Mayou R., et al., 1993). Most of the respondents spoke about the emotional impact of road crashes on them and their families. In this chapter, we attempt to highlight some key areas of impact.

One of the IDI's respondents, Shivam, was just 12 years old when his teenage brother who was riding a bicycle was killed in a road crash near their house in 2016. As per Shivam, his brother was lying on the road for 30 minutes

"An uncle (neighbour) ... took me along with him and on the way, he told me, 'Imagine you never had any brother'."

- IDI Respondent, Uttar Pradesh

before he was taken to the hospital. Even though the Police were there, they waited for his mother to arrive and arrange transport. Throughout the interview, he often used the words "sadness", "emptiness" to describe his feelings after his brother's death.

"I used to keep thinking about my mom's crash. I found it difficult to concentrate on anything else. Like when I used to sit down to study...I would see flashes of that day and its aftermath. "

- IDI Respondent Maharashtra

Like Pinky, (name changed) most of the respondents also spoke about the impact of the crash on their education. For many respondents, the impact was both direct and indirect. Pinky was not able to find time to study since she played the role of primary caregiver for her injured mother as well as she cooked for the whole family. These additional responsibilities meant she had less 'study time'. She was also not able to 'focus' while studying and that impacted her education as well.

IMPACT OF ROAD CRASHES ON ADOLESCENTS

Another respondent from Tamil Nadu mentioned that since his father couldn't take off from work, and they needed the money, he missed his school twice every week for a month till his mother recuperated.

The other aspect in which education got affected was due to non-payment or late submission of school fees. A couple of respondents mentioned that due to their dire financial situation, their parents couldn't pay school fees on time. One respondent even mentioned how the school penalized him by asking him to stand outside the examination hall, since his parents couldn't pay the school fee on time and as a result, he had to drop a year.

M: Were there any changes in the time you spent with friends?

R: Like we used to play with our friends; so, it all stopped completely. I have not played cricket for almost 4 years now.

- IDI Respondent, UP

7.2. IMPACT ON SOCIAL LIFE OF ADOLESCENTS

After analyzing the respondent transcripts, another common area of impact that emerged is the impact road crash outcomes have on respondents' social life as well as the time available for playing with friends. Irrespective of the road crash outcome, respondents mentioned that post-crash, either they couldn't find time to go out and play or their friends weren't keen to play with them. Another reason for curtailing time spent outside with friends was to ensure that no unnecessary expenses were incurred.

7.3. IMPACT ON THE HOUSEHOLD AS REPORTED BY ADOLESCENTS

Adolescents were also probed on their understanding of the financial impact the crash had on their family. While most of them were unaware of the exact costs incurred, they spoke about the impact on their lifestyle as well as the social impact of the crash on the household.

Respondents narrated different ways in which the crash impacted their quality of life. Since their family had to incur expenses on treatment, they were forced to reduce

the quantity and quality of food consumed. This was narrated by different respondents and it affected their food consumption as well as the food consumption of the family.

"I stopped buying clothes. Mother asked me to stop as we had to cut down on our expenses. I felt bad, I never thought I would have to see such days."

"My mother always stored extra provisions. However, she stopped buying extra provisions. We had to give more fruits and vegetables to father, but we were not able to do that, it took more time for his recovery.)"

- IDI Respondent, Tamil Nadu

Respondents also spoke about the compromises they had to make. For some, it manifested in less money for

buying clothes. For others, it manifested more acutely. One respondent narrated how he had to leave school due to the financial situation at home

R: I left school in the 9th standard.

M: Why? You did not like school?

R: I liked it. But I did not go due to the financial situation in the house.

- IDI Respondent Maharashtra

Many respondents articulated the characteristics of intra-family dynamics after the crash with the use of words like "sadness", "strange" and "fear". Concerning dynamics with the rest of the community, most of the respondents had positive experiences barring a couple who spoke about hesitant relatives.

Additionally, most of the female adolescent respondents conveyed how they had to support the household with cooking and other caregiving activities. This meant that

IMPACT OF ROAD CRASHES ON ADOLESCENTS

they had less time for studies or leisure activities.

Two respondents, one from UP and one from Tamil Nadu, also spoke about the apathy of government stakeholders. The respondent from UP spoke about how the police failed to take his brother to the hospital or call the ambulance. His brother had to wait at the crash site for 30 minutes before being taken to hospital.

The respondent from Tamil Nadu spoke about the lack of care received at Government Hospital and how her father's treatment was delayed since the hospital waited for the police case to be registered.

They (Government Hospital) were not treating him (her father) and they said that (police) case has to be filed. Only after that, they will treat him. He was bleeding ... In such a case, they have all the facilities but still they didn't treat my father. They gave me cotton and asked me to clean the blood. I didn't like it at all.

- IDI Respondent from Tamil Nadu

Even though other respondents did not have such experience, many mentioned that their families moved to a private hospital to receive better quality of care. This has also been validated by the quantitative survey. 69.8% of the LIH respondents were not attended immediately at the hospital, in comparison, only 37.9% of HIH respondents were not attended to immediately.

6-POINT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Enactment and Implementation of Child Road Safety provisions in MVAA, 2019

MVAA, 2019 has provisions for mandating the use of Child Helmets, Child Restraints and also penalizes juvenile driving. These sections should be notified by the Central Government under the Central Motor Vehicle Rules and the State Governments should ensure that effective implementation. The Enforcement agencies should also ensure enforcement of child safety provisions.

2. Educational Institute based Support System.

Children and adolescents who are impacted by a road crash directly or indirectly should be provided support from the State. Since the main institution of interaction for them are schools, the education department can ensure access to qualified child therapists. Since road crashes impact nutritional intake of household members, the State

Government can also create a better mechanism to monitor their calorie intake and ensure they get adequate nutrition through the School Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

3 Support for Payment of School Fees for Children from Vulnerable Families.

In the IDIs, adolescents mentioned that financial constraints due to road crash led to either late admission or dropping out of school completely to support their family financially. This was stressed more by male adolescent participants. The State Government should ensure that children from vulnerable families don't have to leave school due to financial constraints. Since almost 80% of adolescents who die in road crashes are male, the Government should ensure that this policy is gender neutral.

4. Ensuring Safe School Zones

Considering around 9% of all road crashes in India are reported near schools and colleges it's imperative to ensure that all road owning agencies ensure that children and adolescents are safe while commuting on roads. Urban Local Bodies (ULB) and Rural Local Bodies (RLB) in villages should create safe school zones by slowing down vehicles by design and improving infrastructure by providing walkable pavements, safe crossings etc. The Union Government should also prescribe standards for this under Section 198A of MVAA, 2019.

5. Enacting Rules on Safe Transport to School

Governments should address safety issue faced by children while commuting to school by making rules regarding school buses, vans, auto rickshaws and other means of transport, for safe transportation of school children.

In 2018, over 4500 children died in road crash deaths in the 4 surveyed states out of which over half the deaths happened in UP. Rules around school transport should be formulated by State Governments to help safeguard children. Standardization of rules for all school transport including personally organized transport will ensure that children coming from poor families don't have to be in overcrowded personally organized transport to cut costs. This is important since parents around 70% of parent respondents from Mumbai, Chennai and Lucknow admitted that their children travel in overcrowded personally organized vehicles. (SaveLIFE, 2019)

6. Issuance of Child Road Safety Policy.

State Governments as part of their State Road Safety Policy, Annual Action Plan and Road Safety Fund should prioritize road safety for children and adolescents. The State Government should standardize rules for safety of children by issuing a child road safety policy. They should highlight information for parents and guardians in local languages. Concrete measures should be budgeted and made part of State Road Safety Annual Action Plan.