

Cover Story



Road traffic crashes: a Sri Lankan overview

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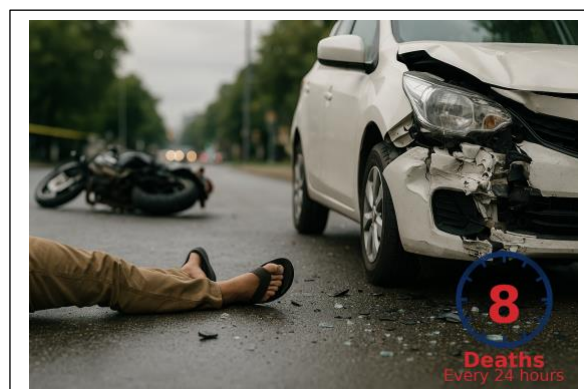
Cover theme - Impact of road traffic crashes in Sri Lanka: Eight people die each day. In the background, an injured motorcyclist lies on the road after a car and motorcycle crash.

Photo credit - Image generated using ChatGPT by Indika Gunawardana, Senior Registrar, Directorate of Non-Communicable Diseases, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka

Road traffic crashes (RTCs) are considered as a significant public health concern worldwide (1). In Sri Lanka, over 37,000 people are admitted to government hospitals for inpatient care after transport-related injuries and nearly eight people die each day (2-3). Over 87% of injuries RTCs result in some form of disability.

Demographics, timing and injury patterns

The economically productive age group, including adolescents, youth and young adults, accounts for the majority of injuries from RTCs, while 76% of victims are male. Most RTCs occur during daytime, 6 am to 6 pm, accounting for 68%, with cases increasing toward the weekend and peaking on Sundays. According to the Annual Acute Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) Report 2018, even though 55.5% of victims had superficial injuries after RTCs, open wounds and fractures accounted for 18.1% and 15.4%, respectively. Lower limbs (32.2%) were most often injured after RTCs, followed by upper limbs (25.5%). Head and face injuries occurred in 17.6% and 9% of cases, respectively (2).



Who is at most risk?

In 2022, motorcyclists (n=820) accounted for the most deaths from RTCs, followed by pedestrians (n=792) and passengers (n=314). Among vehicles other than motorcycles involved in fatal RTCs, lorries (n=320) and three-

wheeled taxis (n=285) were most common, followed by dual-purpose vehicles (n=271), buses (n=235) and cars (n=227) (4).

Because motorcyclists account for most deaths, prevention should prioritize motorcycle crashes. Riders and passengers should wear standard helmets. Many riders do not wear helmets or use substandard ones. Children often ride without helmets. These practices increase the risk of fatal injury following a crash. Under the motor traffic law, only two people may ride on a motorcycle. Exceeding this number disrupts balance and shifts the motorcycle's centre of gravity, increasing crash risk.

Reducing the burden of RTCs

To reduce RTCs and injuries, regulations should be strengthened on these measures: prohibit driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs; keep to safe speeds; avoid dangerous overtaking; and follow traffic rules. Additionally, routine vehicle checks and maintenance are essential (5). Teaching road discipline from early childhood builds safer habits and lowers the long-term burden of RTCs.

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