



## Road accidents in Sri Lanka: Correlations of psychological, cultural and geographical factors in eastern province, Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

At present, the road accidents can be considered as one of the highly threatening causes of deaths. In Sri Lankan context fatal accidents are rising in a considerable manner according to the statistics in year the 2015; where 2801 deaths and 2590 fatal accidents have been reported in Sri Lanka Government, Civil Societies and all the responsible parties in Sri Lanka have implemented various strategies to prevent accidents in addition to the enforcement of traffic laws. Even though there is no reduction in accidents, it has been reported that majority of the accidents are occurred in the Eastern Province. The persuading factor of this study is to identify whether there are special reasons or causes affecting accidents in the Eastern Province. If it is so what are they? How those factors are special or different from other provinces or country? What are the preventive factors or strategies that can be applied? In addressing the above, this study has been done in Akkarepaththu police area where the accidents occur with higher rate in Ampara District in the Eastern province and the samples were selected in two ways. First, randomly selected 117 public, drivers, police officers, students and other communities in the area. Data was gathered through questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. At the second stage used, Forum Theater activities specially did chain of street drama in congested city areas to focus the message of road accidents. This drama research team communicated and built an image among community about the accidents. Along with questionnaires, focus group discussion with participants. Motor cycles and three wheelers have been the major cause of road accidents in the area with a percentage of 75% and 21% respectively. There is a strong connection with psychological, cultural and geographical factors with accidents and it appears through the factors: Women used to sitting by side owing to their cultural factors on the motor cycles, almost all in the Muslim community and they claim their ownership in geographical resources to their way, so that Muslim community act disobediently with law enforcement, military attitudes and heroism are directly and indirectly affecting accidents in the Eastern province. In addition to, it is observed that the juveniles and young men do not hesitate to violate traffic rules in the area. Proper guidance and awareness with implementation of law must be focused with this situation were seen as the suggested solutions for the road accidents in the area.

**Keywords:** accidents, cultural, eastern, geographical, law, psychological

### 1. Introduction

The road accidents can be considered as one of the highly threatening factors in the world status at present. Each year road accidents are responsible for over 1 million deaths and 20 to 50 injuries worldwide. The status in Sri Lanka is not different from this situation too. Especially in Sri Lanka, a person dies once in every 4 hours due to an accident. In 2006,

2238 and 2015, 2801 accidents were reported. Since Sri Lanka is a developing third world country, suffers badly from road traffic accidents. After the separatist conflict came to an end in 2009, road accidents have been the main cause of deaths in Sri Lanka. As an example in Table 1 we can look into the accident rate in the country.

**Table 1:** Fatalities by road user groups

Categories	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Driver/Rider	918	1050	1059	1124	1203	5354
Pedestrian	695	827	748	785	898	3953
Passenger/pillion passenger	507	439	433	428	531	2338
Passenger entering or leaving bus	40	28	28	22	44	162
Passenger falling of vehicle	78	58	60	54	45	295
Total	2238	2402	2328	2413	2721	12102

(Police Reports, 2010)

**Table 2:** Analysis of Data [Year 2015]

Overview	Total
Deaths	2801
Fatal Accidents	2590
Minor Accidents	13095
Critical Accidents	7719
Damages Only	13514

(<http://www.police.lk/index.php/mounted-police/112-traffic-statistics-fatalities-and-no>)

The Akkareipattu police division in the Ampara District has the highest accidents rate comparatively at present more than any other area in Sri Lanka. Especially the majority of the people in this area are Muslims. There are some cultural, religious, geographical and psychological factors which have been affecting road accidents in the area. According to that, this research paper has inquired into special factors and their effect on road accidents.

## 2. Research Problem

To identify whether there are special reasons or causes affecting road accidents in the Eastern Province? If so what are they? How those factors are special different than other provinces or part in country? What are the preventive strategies that can be applied, are the persuading problems of this study.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Data Collection

Data was gathered through the three types of data collection methods.

#### Step One

Questionnaire method was the key instrument in this research. 35 questions were used to collect data with open ended and closed ended questions.

#### Step Two

Interview and Focus group discussion were used as the second step. In this process Drivers, Police Officers and Officer in - charge in Akkareipattu Police Division were included as the members of the Focus Group.

#### Step Three

Forum theatre activities were used in this stage. Public community was a main target group in this process. In this step, through a Street Drama (It was mainly based on road accidents) an image was built on how road traffic accidents was attempted. After that, the research team were interviewed the community which viewed the street drama.

### 3.2 Sample Size

Through random sample method 117 people were selected as research key informers. General public, Police Officers, Professionals, Students and Officers in Charge in Akkareipattu Police Division were selected as a sample.

### 3.4 Data Analyse

The research collected two types of data. Firstly, Qualitative Data and secondly Quantitative Data. Quantitative data was

gathered through the questionnaire survey. The ideas of the general public to reduce and prevent accidents and the attitudes in the measures of the police to control accidents were collected through the interviews and focus group discussion were analysed qualitatively. Quantitative data was analysed through the Microsoft Excel and SPSS.

## 4. Results and Findings

When considering road accidents in the area, motor bikes, three wheelers, buses, and car accidents can be identified as the types of vehicles prone to road accidents. When the frequent occurring of accidents is concerned, Table 3 has highlighted how 113 accidents have happened due to motor bikes.

**Table 3:** Frequently occurring accidents in the area

Accidents	Quantity
Motor Bikes	113
Three Wheelers	31
Buses	04
Cars	01
Vans	00
Others	01
Totals	150

*Sources:* Field Survey 2016

Juveniles riding motor bikes and riding without helmets have become the two major reasons for the increase of motor bikes related accidents. Especially because of the poverty there is a trend of parents going abroad for employment in this area. So the connection between parents and their children has been strained. Then the attention on the child drifts away from the family and most of them join a peer group. So these juveniles under 18 years frequently use motor bikes which are called as 'Electric bikes. So the research revealed that 14% of juveniles driving have affected road accidents.

Also majority of the people in the research have shown to disobey road rules which are a reason for the increase of road accidents in the area. According to the Table 4, 33 of not following road signs, 84 of high speeding, 54 of riding without helmet, and 28 of driving without driving license can be identified.

**Table 4:** Reasons for frequently happening accidents

Reasons	Quantity
High speeding	84
Riding without helmets	54
Not following road sign	33
Driving without driving license	28

*Sources:* Field Survey 2016

A considerable portion of the people are not following or obeying the rules. Especially majority [98%] of the peoples are Muslims in the area. So according to their culture, some of the people think that rules and regulations which implemented by the police are disturbance to them. Therefore as the result of these attitudes people do not obey the police and rules in the area.

**Table 5:** Major reasons for road accident

Reasons	%
Advising and Forgiving	45
Public Attitudes	44
Cultural Background	37
Socio - economic background	24
Religious Influence	22

*Source:* Field Survey 2016

As shown in Table 5 Basically 45% of the people in the research have shown that only advising and forgiving has become a main factor for the accidents in the area. As well as 44% of people declared that public attitudes have affected to the rise of accidents in the area. Therefore according to this mental state, people are not afraid to disobey and break the rules. In addition 24% of people and 37% of people in the research sample have been identified for their socio economic background and cultural background which have affected for most of the road accidents in the area. When consider about the cultural background, Muslim people have a belief about male patriarchy. Therefore when Muslim women go on a motor bike with a man normally they sit by side owing. As a result of this, motor bike accidents have increased in the area. Also the research revealed that not using helmets was another main reason for accidents. In Table 1.4, particularly 54 people have shown this state. Religious reasons and some difficulties have affected for this situation too. In the Muslim culture women use 'Fardava' to cover their head and man use a hat. As the result of this most of people do not like to use helmet and they forget to wear helmets when they ride. Considering the geographical factors, most of the accidents are happened during the period of morning and night as 33% and 49%. On the other hand Table 6 has shown 38 on the location of the main road and sub roads, 27 narrow roads and also 16 road bounds have geographically reasoned for the road accidents in the area directly and indirectly.

**Table 6:** Geographical Factors for road accidents

Factors	Quantity
Location of the main road and sub road	31
Narrow roads	27
Road Bound	16

*Survey:* Field Research 2016

## 5. Conclusions, implications, significance

### Conclusions

When considering geographical, cultural and psychological factors for the road accidents in Akkareipattu area, Cultural factors can be identified as a main reason for road accidents. Majority of the people are representing the Muslim community in the area. So they have special cultural

background. Through this process on one side they do not obey road rules in the area. They obey the Muslim culture in the area. Therefore as the results of this personal attitudes and cultural effects like,

- Female sitting by side owing
- Not wearing the helmet
- Disobedience with the law enforcement
- Military attitudes
- Heroism

Akkareipattu area has become a main location in a road accident process more than other places in Sri Lanka. In addition, lack of knowledge about the road rules and relationship between police and public can be identified as the other factors for the road accidents in the area.

## 6. Suggestions

1. Planning quality and efficient public centred awareness programmes about accidents and its consequences.
2. Establishing a better road sign systems.
3. Widening roads and developing the road system.
4. Law should be applied equally to everyone and that will lead the public to a sense of self-obeying.
5. Policy making must be an essential fact when developing the relationship between public and the police.
6. Get compulsory measures to assure the correct positions ride or drive.
7. Join people to obtain practical measures of reducing accidents.

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