

EDITORIAL: THE MODERN KILLER

Seven people are killed and 54 others are injured each day as a result of motor vehicular accidents in Peninsular Malaysia. In 1980 a total of 2,568 people were killed as a consequence of motor vehicular accidents in Peninsular Malaysia. Road traffic accidents is increasingly becoming the modern killer of mankind not only in Malaysia but all over the world. ¹

In the developed countries, mortality from accidents generally takes third place after cardiovascular diseases and neoplasms. In the age groups from one to 44 years of age, which have relatively low general mortality rates, accidents occupy the first place. For example in the USA, in 1975, for both sexes, 79.5 percent of all deaths in the age group 15 - 24 years were due to accidents of one kind or other. It has been estimated that about 10 percent of all deaths in developed countries is due to accidents and that the proportion of the population admitted to hospitals because of accidents of one kind or other is more than 1 percent of the population. ²

This world-wide pandemic of morbidity and mortality from accidents, particularly motor vehicular accidents, is ever increasing. In

Peninsular Malaysia, the number of motor vehicular accidents has increased by 3.5 times in ten years from 16,847 accidents in 1971 to 59,084 accidents in 1980 (Table I) and the number of casualties increased in the same period by 2.6 times from 8,481 to 22,404 (Table II).

MODERNIZATION

Modernization and development continue to be associated with an ever-increasing desire for rapid transportation and speed. Over the ten-year period, 1971 to 1980, the number of vehicles on the roads in Peninsular Malaysia increased 3.23 times from 730,035 vehicles to 2,357,386 vehicles, and in 1980 Peninsular Malaysia, with a population of 11.1 million, had a total of 2.6 million licensed drivers. In spite of the development of more roads, one consequence of this modernization process has been an increase in the density of vehicles per mile of road. In 1971 there were 61 vehicles per mile of road, but in 1980 this had increased to 163 vehicles per mile of road (Table I). Correspondingly the number of accidents and casualties per mile of road increased over the ten-year period from 1.1 accidents and 0.7 casualties to 4.1 accidents and 1.55

TABLE I
MOTOR VEHICULAR ACCIDENTS IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA, 1971 - 1980

Year	Vehicles on the road	Vehicles involved in accidents	No. of accidents	No. of vehicles per mile of road	No. of accidents per mile of road	No. of casualties per mile of road
1971	730,035	26,025	16,847	61	1.1	0.7
1972	802,831	34,944	22,151	72	2.0	0.9
1973	939,951	45,916	29,286	84	2.6	0.6
1974	1,090,279	39,056	24,581	97	2.2	0.75
1975	1,267,119	75,653	48,233	105	4.0	1.6
1976	1,429,845	80,985	48,291	116	4.0	1.57
1977	1,621,271	86,688	54,222	128	4.29	1.61
1978	1,829,958	91,122	56,021	136	4.18	1.62
1979	1,989,391	94,788	57,931	144	4.21	1.64
1980	2,357,386	99,485	59,084	163	4.09	1.55

TABLE II
CASUALTIES FROM MOTOR VEHICULAR ACCIDENTS IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA
1971 — 1980

Year	Casualties				Total Deaths*
	On the spot deaths	Serious injuries	Minor injuries	Total casualties	
1971	697	1,392	6,392	8,481	1,548
1972	669	1,674	8,373	10,716	1,712
1973	1,113	2,504	12,176	15,793	1,922
1974	923	2,124	10,285	13,332	2,303
1975	1,511	3,086	14,843	19,440	2,317
1976	1,523	3,467	14,337	19,327	2,405
1977	1,740	3,805	14,760	20,305	2,512
1978	1,909	4,535	15,215	21,659	2,561
1979	1,979	6,012	14,620	22,611	2,607
1980	2,001	5,664	14,739	22,404	2,568

* Total deaths in consequence of injuries received

casualties per mile of road respectively. Modernization has brought in its shadow a pandemic of motor vehicular accidents.

vulnerable road users accounted for 67 percent of all the casualties.

CASUALTIES AND DEATHS

In 1980, the largest number of casualties and deaths from motor vehicular accidents were motor cyclists and pedestrians who accounted for 35.5 percent and 18.6 percent of all the casualties and deaths (Table III). Cyclists, another vulnerable group, accounted for 12.9 percent of all casualties and deaths. Together these three groups of

CAUSES OF ACCIDENTS

Of the 59,084 accidents that occurred in 1980, 51,997 (88.0 percent) were due to driver faults such as driving without due care and attention (22.7 percent), dangerous driving including speeding (18.0 percent) and inconsiderate driving (6.0 percent).

Obviously drivers do not seem to have sufficient

TABLE III
CASUALTIES BY TYPES OF ROAD USERS, PENINSULAR MALAYSIA, 1980

Type of road user	Casualties			Total
	On the spot deaths	Serious injuries	Minor injuries	
Pedestrians	435	986	2,748	4,169 (18.61%)
Cyclists	293	690	1,919	2,902 (12.95%)
Trishaw riders	8	23	63	94 (0.42%)
Motor cyclists	570	2,131	4,806	7,507 (35.51%)
Pillion riders	127	489	882	1,498 (6.69%)
Motor vehicle drivers and passengers	288	685	2,485	3,458 (15.43%)
Animal drivers	0	0	1	1
Private commercial passengers	219	584	1,592	2,395 (10.69%)
Heavy goods drivers	61	75	242	378 (1.69%)
Other road users	0	1	1	2 (0.01%)
Total	2,001*	5,664	14,739	22,404 (100%)

* excluding 567 seriously injured persons who subsequently died.

TABLE IV
MAIN CAUSES OF MOTOR VEHICULAR ACCIDENTS IN 1980

Causes	No.	(%)
1. Faults of Drivers		
(a) Intoxication	110	(0.19)
(b) Driving without due care and attention	13,407	(22.70)
(c) Dangerous driving (including speeding)	10,665	(18.05)
(d) Inconsiderate driving (e.g. on wrong side of road)	3,545	(6.00)
(e) Parking faults	132	(0.22)
(f) Overloading (goods and passengers)	42	(0.07)
(g) Other driving faults	24,096	(40.78)
Sub-total (faults of drivers)	51,997	(88.00)
2. Faults of Pedestrians		
(a) Intoxication	27	(0.05)
(b) Infirmary	105	(0.18)
(c) Jay walking (carelessness)	1,665	(2.82)
(d) Other pedestrian faults	1,093	(1.85)
Sub-total (faults of pedestrians)	2,890	(4.89)
3. Mechanical faults	371	(0.63)
4. Animals (e.g. unescorted cattle)	977	(1.65)
5. Road faults (e.g. obstruction, slippery surface)	1,253	(2.12)
6. Light faults (e.g. defective vehicle light, traffic lights)	857	(1.45)
7. Other causes (not listed above)	739	(1.25)
TOTAL NUMBER OF ACCIDENTS	59,084	(100)

skills and ability to handle the problems faced by the demands of existing traffic conditions. In spite of the recent laudable attempts to increase the standard of driving tests, much remains to be desired regarding the standard of driving schools. There are many instances of student drivers appearing for tests after only 10 hours of practice. There is a need for driving school instructors to be taught the basics of safe driving and road courtesy. This must clearly be passed on to student drivers. Currently, driving schools seem more interested in their students passing driving tests as rapidly as is possible rather than in safe and courteous driving.

There is also need for separate driving schools for motor cyclists, as motor cyclists account for the largest group of road users who are killed each year. Currently, there are no schools of motor cycle driving and it is high time that this be required by law. Legal measures must also be taken to confine inexperienced motor cyclists to the smaller

machines. Only experienced motor cyclists should be allowed to drive the heavier motor cycles.

Motor vehicular accidents, particularly motor cycle accidents, rob the nation of its young. The highest casualty rates are for those aged 20 to 25 years (Fig. 1), and every effort must be made to control this pandemic of casualties and deaths that increasingly affect the nation.

Jay walking and carelessness on the part of pedestrians accounted for 1,665 casualties during 1980. Intoxication on the part of drivers or pedestrians accounted for 137 casualties. Undoubtedly, intoxication is a hazard that should receive the attention of medical practitioners both from the preventive as well as therapeutic point of view. Medical practitioners should also bear in mind the side-effects of drugs that depress the senses and the reaction-time of patients who should obviously be advised not to drive when such drugs

are prescribed.

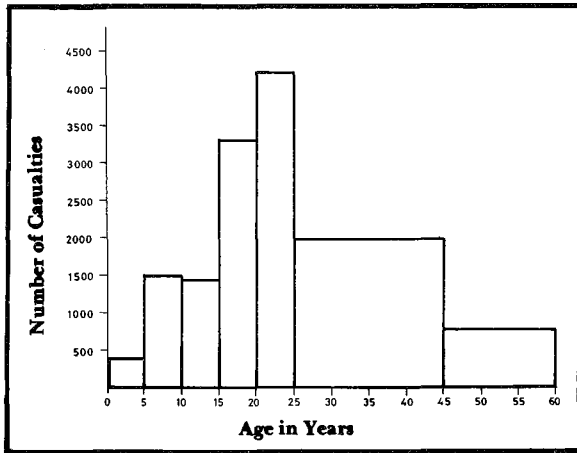


Fig. 1 Number of motor vehicular accidents according to age group, Peninsular Malaysia, 1980.

PREVENTION

It cannot be over emphasized that the current pandemic of casualties and deaths from accidents, particularly motor vehicular accidents, is increasing. A 260 percent increase in the number of casualties due to motor vehicular accidents over a ten-year period is a warning that cannot and must not be ignored. This violent and tragic cause of disablement and death, particularly of youths in the prime of health, must be prevented. Education of the public, legislation requiring minimum standard for driving schools and other efforts to ensure minimum safety standards as well as the careful attention of medical practitioners regarding intoxication and drugs affecting the reaction-time of users, are examples of some of the multiple efforts that must be made to stem this pandemic of casualties and deaths.

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REFERENCES

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- ² World Health Organization. Sixth Report on the World Health Situation 1973-1977, Part I: Global Analysis, Geneva, 1980.