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Awareness on Road Safety at Village Khamhariya, District Durg, Chhattisgarh

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Road traffic crashes are among the leading causes of death and disability worldwide. The World Health Organization estimates that road traffic injuries claim approximately 1.19 million lives every year, and that they are the leading cause of death among children and young adults (WHO, 2023). The United Nations has proclaimed the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030 with the ambitious target of reducing road deaths and injuries by at least 50% by 2030 (United Nations, 2020).

India accounts for a large share of this burden. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways reported 1,68,491 deaths in road accidents in the calendar year 2022 (MoRTH, 2023). A considerable proportion of victims are vulnerable road users, namely pedestrians, cyclists and riders of motorised two-wheelers, and a significant share of crashes occur on rural stretches of national and state highways. Rural areas face particular difficulties: roads are often shared by fast motor vehicles and slow-moving traffic, street lighting is limited, speed-calming measures are scarce, and post-crash emergency care may be far away.

Legal and engineering measures alone cannot eliminate crashes unless they are accompanied by changes in behaviour. The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019 strengthened penalties for violations such as not wearing a helmet, drink-driving and over-speeding, but compliance in villages depends largely on awareness, social norms and the example set within the community. Awareness programmes delivered in the local language, at the village itself, and with the participation of its own members are therefore an essential complement to enforcement.

Researchers and scholars in universities are well placed to carry out such programmes as part of their extension and outreach responsibilities. The present article documents a road-safety awareness effort at village Khamhariya in District Durg, Chhattisgarh, conducted by a doctoral research scholar of the Department of Forest Products and Utilization. Although the author's academic work concerns forest products, the movement of forest and agricultural produce by tractors, carts and light goods vehicles along village roads, and the daily travel of forest-dependent households, make road safety a practical livelihood concern in rural Chhattisgarh.

Study Area

Khamhariya is a village in District Durg, in the plains of central Chhattisgarh. Agriculture is the main occupation, supplemented by wage labour and seasonal collection and sale of locally available produce. Residents depend on motorised two-wheelers, bicycles, tractors and shared vehicles for travel to markets, schools, health facilities and workplaces in neighbouring towns.



View of the main village road at Khamhariya showing mixed traffic

Approach and Methodology

The programme followed a participatory, community-based approach. It was planned in four stages:

1. Preliminary visit and informal baseline: the author visited the village, walked along the principal roads, and interacted with the sarpanch, teachers, farmers, women's self-help group members and youth to identify local hazards, such as unprotected junctions, roadside parking, wandering livestock, and unlit stretches.
2. Preparation of material: simple posters and pictorial charts in Hindi and Chhattisgarhi were prepared, covering helmet use, seat belts, speed, signage, crossing the road and emergency numbers.
3. Awareness sessions: group meetings were held at a common village location and at the school, using talks, question-answer discussion and live demonstrations.
4. Feedback and follow-up: participants' questions and suggestions were noted, and local volunteers were encouraged to continue spreading the messages.

Participation was voluntary. Various programme were conducted during this session, in this programme sum of 85 local peoples benefitted by this programme, number of participants were 44 children, 19 women, 13 men, 9 elderly) Panchayat Representatives and administration body were also present in various programmes.



Awareness session with villagers on safe road-use behaviour at Khamhariya

Key Messages Delivered

The content was kept simple, practical and directly related to the daily travel of villagers. Table 1 summarises the principal topics, the main risk addressed and the message conveyed.

Table 1. Principal topics covered during the awareness programme

Topic	Risk addressed	Key message
Helmet use	Head injury among two-wheeler riders and pillion riders	Wear a properly fastened, certified helmet on every trip, however short; the pillion rider too. Helmets reduce the risk of fatal injury by about 42% and of head injury by about 69% (WHO, 2023).
Seat belts and child safety	Ejection and severe injury in cars, jeeps and light vehicles	Use seat belts in front and rear seats; children should not be carried on laps or on the front seat.
Speed and drink-driving	Loss of control, delayed reaction, high-severity crashes	Never drive after consuming alcohol; slow down near the village, school, market and junctions.
Safe walking and crossing	Pedestrian and child crashes	Stop, look right and left, cross at a visible place, and walk facing traffic where there is no footpath.
Slow-moving and farm vehicles	Rear-end collisions at night with tractors, trolleys and carts	Fit reflective tape and rear lights; avoid overloading and do not allow riding on loaded trolleys.
Transport of produce	Overloaded or unbalanced vehicles carrying agricultural and forest produce	Load within capacity, secure the load, and keep it from obstructing the driver's view or the vehicle's lights.
Licence and documents	Unlicensed and untrained driving, particularly by minors	Drive only with a valid licence and registration; minors must not drive.
Emergency response	Delay in help after a crash	Call the emergency number (112), do not leave the injured alone, avoid unnecessary movement, and assist the ambulance and police.

Demonstrations with a helmet and a seat belt, and pictorial posters, were found to hold attention better than lectures alone. School children were encouraged to carry the messages home, particularly the request that elders wear helmets and avoid driving after drinking.



Demonstration of road-safety material and posters to school children

Observations and Community Response

1. Pre-programme practices as reported by villagers: [for example, proportion of two-wheeler riders who regularly wore helmets; use of seat belts; knowledge of the emergency number].
2. Hazards identified by the community: [for example, a specific junction, a stretch without lighting, parking near the school, stray cattle on the road].
3. Response and commitments: [for example, a pledge to wear helmets, a request to the panchayat for signboards or speed breakers, formation of a volunteer group].

Reporting these observations transparently, including the limits of an informal baseline, will strengthen the credibility of the article. Behavioural change cannot be established from a single session; a short follow-up after a few weeks, by observing helmet use at a fixed point on the road for a fixed time, would give a simple measurable indicator.

Discussion

Rural road safety is shaped by an interaction of human, vehicle and road factors. In villages like Khamhariya, the commonest human factors are non-use of helmets, speeding on straight roads, riding by minors, and drink-driving. Vehicle-related factors include poor maintenance, overloading and lack of reflectors on tractors and carts. Road-related factors include absent markings and signage, unprotected junctions, and roadside obstructions. Interventions are most effective when they address all three together, which is the principle of the “Safe System” approach promoted internationally. Awareness is not a substitute for enforcement or engineering, but it prepares the ground for both. A community that understands why a speed breaker or a signboard is needed is more likely to request it, accept it and maintain it. Similarly, awareness of the rules and of the risks of violations increases the social acceptability of enforcement. Because the messages in this programme were delivered in the local language, by a person from the region, and used examples from daily village life, they were more relatable than generic campaigns. A further point is the role of the livelihood context. Rural households in Chhattisgarh transport agricultural and forest produce to local markets using tractors, trolleys and light vehicles, often in the early morning or after dark. Reflective tape, working lights, load limits and driver awareness are low-cost measures that directly reduce risk for these households and should be part of any rural road-safety message.



Participants and volunteers at the close of the awareness programme

Recommendations

On the basis of the experience, the following actions are suggested for sustaining road-safety awareness at the village level:

1. Constitute a small village road-safety committee, with representation from the panchayat, school, women's groups and youth, to meet periodically and report hazards.
2. Request the competent road authority to install warning signs, speed breakers and reflectors at identified hazardous locations near the village, school and market.
3. Integrate short road-safety sessions into school assemblies and village meetings (gram sabha), with children acting as messengers to their families.
4. Promote fitting of reflective tape and lights on tractors, trolleys and carts through campaigns before the harvest and market season.
5. Organise basic first-aid and emergency-response training, and display emergency contact numbers at prominent places.
6. Encourage universities and research institutions to include road-safety outreach among their extension activities in neighbouring villages.

Conclusion

Road safety in villages cannot be left to chance. The awareness programme at Khamhariya demonstrates that a modest, participatory and locally adapted effort can introduce practical safety messages to a rural community and open a conversation on local hazards. Sustained improvement will require follow-up, the involvement of the panchayat and school, and coordination with the agencies responsible for enforcement and road infrastructure. It is hoped that this report will encourage similar outreach by academic researchers in other villages of Chhattisgarh.

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