



Under the Influence

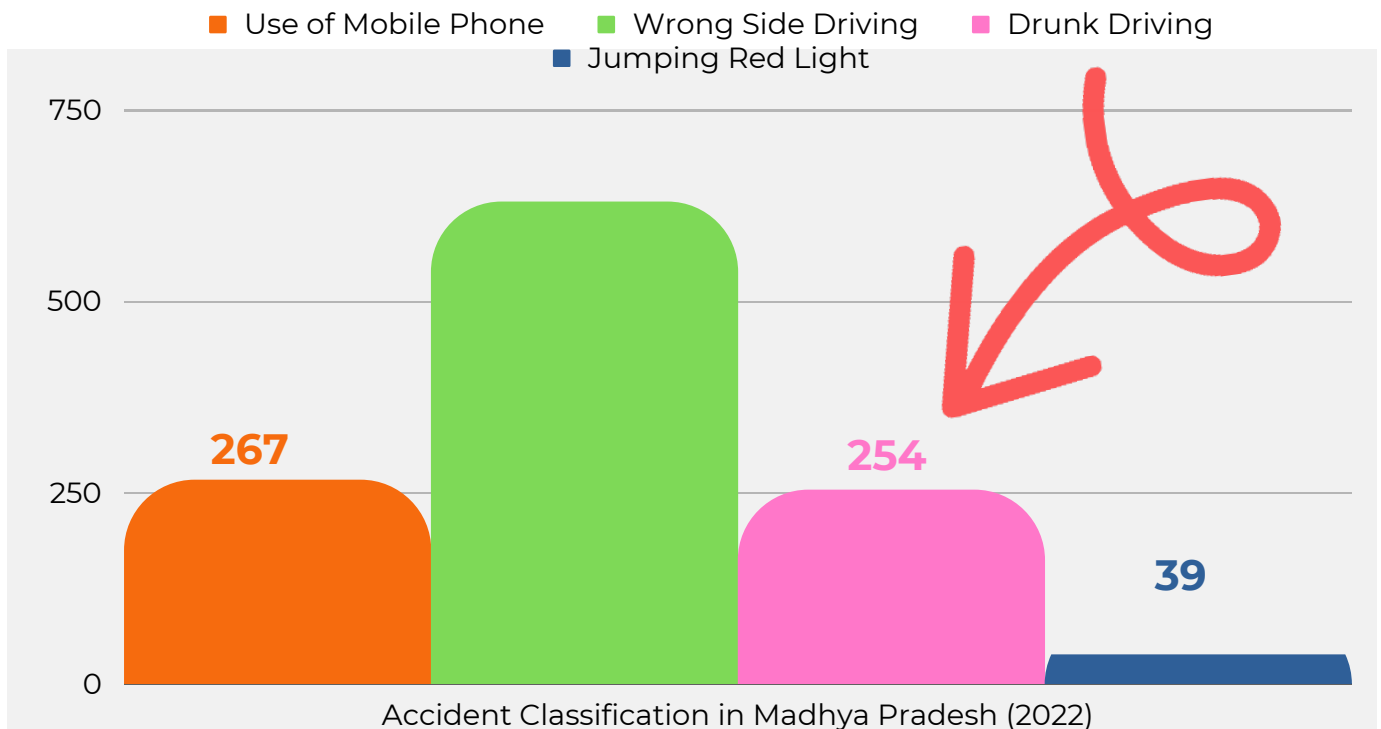
Unveiling the Menace of
Drunk Driving in India



Overview

Every year, countless lives are shattered, families torn apart, and communities left in mourning due to a reckless and preventable choice – drink driving.

The statistics surrounding this global issue are both staggering and sobering. In India, a harrowing number of 3314 fatalities occurred in 2021 as a direct result of individuals getting behind the wheel while under the influence of alcohol.



These tragedies, however, are not just numbers; they represent the stories of mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, and friends whose lives were cut short due to a decision that could have been avoided.

Adding to the distress, in 2021, among children (aged 14 years and below) killed in road accidents, 25% were killed as a direct impact of drunk-driving crashes. Of these, in 55% of the cases, the child killed was in the vehicle driven by the drunk driver.



The Emotional and Financial Toll of Drink Driving

When it comes to the devastating consequences of drunk driving, the toll extends beyond the immediate and tragic loss of life and physical injuries. Families and communities are also burdened with both an economic and emotional cost, leaving indelible scars on individuals and society as a whole.

Hospitalisation cost - When someone is seriously injured in a drunk driving accident in India, the cost incurred for their medical treatment and recovery averages Rs 3.64 lakh. This substantial amount can wreak havoc on a family's financial stability. Even for those with minor injuries, the financial burden is significant. The cost per minor injured person stands at Rs 77,938, a substantial sum that can strain family budgets and savings.

Exclusion from medical insurance - Adding to the financial concerns of those involved in drunk driving accidents is the fact that drunken driving is a major exclusion from motor insurance policies. Exclusions are specific situations in which you cannot raise a claim with your bike or car insurance. This exclusion means that if you are driving in an inebriated state and are involved in an accident, the insurance company is NOT liable to pay for the damages. Instead, you are required to bear the entire cost of the accident from your own pocket.

Loss of Income - Severe injuries sustained in drunk driving accidents often lead to long-term or permanent disability. This can result in the loss of income for the victim and, consequently, the family. Even minor injuries can lead to temporary work loss, impacting the financial stability of the household.

Grief and mental health - Drunk driving destroys lives right away, causing immense grief among families. Research indicates that those who lose their loved ones are more likely to develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Children, in particular, are at risk, with one out of every four experiencing trauma before the age of 16. The impact also extends to communities. Following such accidents, rates of depression and anxiety soar, resulting in a widespread ripple effect of suffering. The emotional wounds inflicted by drunk driving are not limited to individuals; they affect the entire community, emphasising the need for us to take immediate action and show empathy.



HOW ALCOHOL AFFECTS DRIVING ABILITY?



Alcohol severely impairs driving abilities by affecting the brain's function, including thinking, reasoning, and muscle coordination. As alcohol levels increase in the body, its negative impact on the central nervous system intensifies.

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC)

Alcohol is absorbed through the stomach and intestine, entering the bloodstream until the liver can metabolize it. Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) measures the alcohol in a specific volume of blood. A BAC of .08 g/dL significantly raises crash risk, leading to its illegality in most places. Notably, even small amounts impair driving. In 2021, 2,266 people died in alcohol-related crashes where drivers had BACs of .01 to .07 g/dL. BAC is measured using breathalyzers or blood tests.





INFLUENCE OF BLOOD ALCOHOL LEVELS

BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION (BAC) IN G/DL	TYPICAL EFFECTS	PREDICTABLE EFFECTS ON DRIVING
.02	Some loss of judgment; relaxation, slight body warmth, altered mood	Decline in visual functions (rapid tracking of a moving target), decline in ability to perform two tasks at the same time (divided attention)
.05	Exaggerated behavior, may have loss of small-muscle control (e.g., focusing your eyes), impaired judgment, usually good feeling, lowered alertness, release of inhibition	Reduced coordination, reduced ability to track moving objects, difficulty steering, reduced response to emergency driving situations
.08	Muscle coordination becomes poor (e.g., balance, speech, vision, reaction time, and hearing), harder to detect danger; judgment, self-control, reasoning, and memory are impaired	Concentration, short-term memory loss, speed control, reduced information processing capability (e.g., signal detection, visual search), impaired perception
.10	Clear deterioration of reaction time and control, slurred speech, poor coordination, and slowed thinking	Reduced ability to maintain lane position and brake appropriately
.15	Far less muscle control than normal, vomiting may occur (unless this level is reached slowly or a person has developed a tolerance for alcohol), major loss of balance	Substantial impairment in vehicle control, attention to driving task, and in necessary visual and auditory information processing



LEGAL CONSEQUENCES



In India, there is a rise in drunk driving cases due to urbanization and increased affluence. Driving under the influence (DUI) is a criminal offense under Section 185 of The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988. According to this act, individuals caught driving under the influence of alcohol exceeding 30 mg per 100 ml of blood, as detected by a breath analyzer test, or those under the influence of drugs to the extent of impairing their control over the vehicle, are deemed guilty of drunk driving.

For a first offense, a person found guilty of DUI can face imprisonment for up to six months and/or a fine extending to two thousand rupees. Subsequent offenses within three years of the initial offense can lead to imprisonment for up to two years and/or a fine of three thousand rupees. The law aims to curb the growing instances of drunk driving, addressing the challenges posed by urbanization and increasing affluence in the country.



In the face of this menace, society stands at a crossroads. Education, awareness, and a profound sense of responsibility can dismantle this perilous path. Every individual's choice to refrain from drinking and driving becomes a beacon of hope, illuminating a safer, more compassionate future for all.