



The influence of fatalistic beliefs on risky road use behavior in developing countries

Ahsan Kayani, Mark King, Judy Fleiter

➤ There is little discussion of fatalism in the road safety literature, and limited research. However, fatalism is a potential barrier to participation in health-promoting behaviours, particularly among the populations of developing countries and to some extent in developed countries. Many people still believe in divine discretion and magical powers as causes of road crashes in different parts of the world.

➤ Fatalistic beliefs and beliefs in mystical powers and superstition [3] appear to influence perceptions of crash risk and consequently lead people to take risks and neglect safety measures.

➤ Fatalistic beliefs may cause individuals to be resigned to risks because they cannot do anything to reduce these risks.



Drivers use holy verses in vehicles to prevent road crashes



It is common for drivers to attach cloth, horse hair and other materials to vehicles to protect against black magic, bad luck, and to prevent others from wishing harm on a driver (evil eye).

➤ Road crashes in low- and middle-income nations kill more than 1 million people/year (approx. 90% of the global road toll) [1]. Approximately 250,000 people die annually in road crashes in South Asia, with Pakistan high on the list of countries with a serious road crash problem. Road crash fatalities in Pakistan are estimated to be approximately 40,000 people/year with many more people sustaining serious injuries [1].

➤ Among human factors contributing to crashes are attitudes and beliefs, including fatalism. Most of the traffic safety research has been conducted in high income countries. Less progress has been made in addressing human factors contributing to crashes in developing countries as compared to improvements in roads and vehicles. This is especially true of fatalistic beliefs and behaviours. This is a significant omission, since in many developing countries there are strong worldviews in which predestination persists as a central idea, i.e. that one's life (and death) and other events are predetermined.

➤ Predestination is usually expressed as a belief that an individual does not have personal control over circumstances and their lives are determined through a divine or powerful external agency. These views are at odds with the dominant themes of modern health promotion and present significant challenges for road safety.

➤ The strong sense of predestination and fate are in contradiction with an injury prevention orientation where events are seen as preventable and one is in control of one's life. Such beliefs can encumber efforts to promote a rational systems approach to road safety. The deep-rooted persistence of certain beliefs may lead to systematic errors of judgment which mean that any new information to the contrary is overlooked or misinterpreted [2]. This bias influences risk perception at an individual and collective level.

➤ In Pakistan the fatalistic beliefs which contribute to road crashes stem from the country's religious and cultural background. The majority of Pakistanis believe in divine discretion as the sole factor behind road crashes. The typical mindset is to see fate as the reason for road crashes rather than the violation of a particular road law. Unfortunately, because of the religious and cultural beliefs that underlie this, the public has learnt to accept the loss in road trauma. This does not seem to be well understood by policy makers, implementers, road users and other road safety stakeholders. As a result, fatalistic beliefs are not yet considered as a social/health-related problem in Pakistan.

➤ Therefore, the aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of the formal characteristic of fatalistic beliefs and the diverse typology of belief systems in Pakistan and to identify how they work within the general conception of fate in relation to risky behaviour and road crashes.



Horse hair and red cloth are used in vehicles to avoid black magic

Method: An anthropological approach will be taken to this research. The sample size is anticipated to be 25-35 participants. Interviews will be conducted in Lahore and Islamabad, Pakistan. Participants will be police, policy makers, and general drivers and will be interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview format.

Expected Outcomes: This study will shed more light on the religious and socio-cultural determinants of risky road use in Pakistan and it is anticipated that the findings could be used as a blueprint for the design of interventions aimed at influencing broad-spectrum health attitudes and practices among the communities in this region. By understanding attitudes and behaviours related to fatalism, it should be possible to improve the education of general road users, such that they are less likely to attribute road crashes to chance or fate.

References

- 1) WHO, www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/road_safety_status/2009.
- 2) Kruglanski, AW et al. *Eur J Soc Psy* 13, 1-44, 1983.
- 3) Kouabenan, DR. *Risk Analysis* 18(3) 243-252, 1998.