Comparison of driving safety policy in Japan and Iran

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1. Introduction

The motor vehicle has become a way of life as well as a convenient tool in the modern society. If we fail to use it properly, however, it can become a source of tragic accidents or of great nuisance to roadside residents in the form of noise, vibrations, and other related disturbances. In the motorized society it is important for every one to help to build a traffic environment in which all members are able to move around safely and smoothly without causing trouble to others [1]. According to the World Health Organization, each year road crashes kill nearly 1.2 million people and injure or disable 20-50 million more across the world. Low and middle income countries account for 90% of all road traffic fatalities. Many developing countries are increasing the rate of motorized vehicle use at up to 18% per year. As developing countries increase vehicle use, road traffic injuries are expected to become the third leading cause of death and disability worldwide by 2020. More than 40% of all road traffic deaths occur among those 25 years old or younger. In low and middle income countries, vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and public transportation users) are most likely to be involved in a crash. In high income countries, those most at risk are the drivers. This paper is aimed to compare road traffic accident and safety of Japan and Iran [2].

2. Traffic accident in Japan

The annual number of fatalities from road traffic accidents in Japan peaked at 16,765 in 1970. In the same year, the Japanese government enacted the Traffic Safety Policies Law. In accordance with this law, expert panels have developed plans known as Fundamental Traffic Safety Programs every five years since 1971.

These programs have provided the framework for comprehensive and systematic measures aimed at improving traffic safety.

Beginning in 1971 traffic fatalities began to decline and continued a steady downward trend until reaching 8,466 in 1979. Thereafter, however, fatalities turned upward again and continued to rise until 1992, when a new downward trend began.

In 2006, traffic fatalities decreased to 6,400, the first time in 51 years (since 1955) that the death toll fell below 7,000. Moreover, accidents and casualties declined to 886,864 and 1,104,551 respectively [3, 4].

3. Encyclical situation of Iran road crashes

Iran as one of the developing countries with 70,157,836 populations has a high rate of fatalities due to traffic accident. In the recent years rate of the motor vehicle increases remarkably and in the last ten years it has been increased about 4 times.

The number of traffic accident has been estimated about 923,847 in 2006.

The fatalities in 2006 were 27,567. Compare to 2005 this number was increased 2.3 times for city accidents and 3 times for road accidents [5].

4. Risk factor for accident in Iran

Risk factors of accident in Iran can be categorized in to 4 different factors. The first one is human factor...
as we can say is the most important one, the second factor is road safety, the third one is safety of the vehicles and the last one is climate conditions.

4.1. Human factors

Important issues of the human factors are the high speed driving, indiscreetly overtaking which means the vehicle changes lanes and passes the vehicle in front in dangerous situations and also not to keep adequate distance from the front vehicle.

The other factor is tiredness and sleepiness of the driver which increases the risk of accident, not to drive between the lanes (Fig. 1) or changing the lane frequently and unnecessarily.

Although using seat belts for the front seats is mandatory in Iran, still many drivers in the cities do not obey the rule but using the seat belt in the express ways is increasing.

The factors were mentioned above have direct effect on accident but seat belt is for safety of passengers. It means when an accident occurs, it reduces the risk of injuries.

4.2. Policies of the roads

Roads can be divided into two categories, the first in the cities, and the seconds, between the cities which are express ways and ordinary roads.

The ordinary roads end to country sides or to the small towns. These two way country roads are still old, narrow and unsafe, which lots of them cross among mountains. This situation increases the risk of serious accidents that occur frequently (Figs. 2, 3). Also roads are not equipped with appropriate safety signs and fluorescent indicator for the night time.

The other problem is mirror, although it is a necessary indicator in the curve roads, its use is not as common as Japan.

4.3. Vehicle safety

In Iran some kinds of vehicle which have high speed and acceleration are driven without acceptable safety. These vehicles are not strong enough in collision, but regarding to the economic situation of many Iranians, they are driven very often and unfortunately many injuries occur because of them. Lots of vehicles do not have air bags or high quality breaks such as ABS.

In addition, annually or biannually checking of the vehicles such as Shaken which is mandatory in Japan does not exist in Iran.

4.4. Climate conditions

The last risk factor is whether condition. Iran with the 1,648,195 km² area has various climates; rainy,
snowy, foggy and also sand storm is common in different parts of Iran in different seasons which make the road slippery or decrease the vision and cause serious accidents.

5. Safety week in Japan

Originally begun in 1948 in response to the increase in motor traffic in regional Japanese cities, the government officially adopted a twice-annual Traffic Safety Week system in 1962, designating April 6-15 in the spring and September 21-30 in the fall as special periods to promote "safety driving". Everywhere you go for the next ten days, signs and flags will remind drivers to slow down, and there'll be plenty of police checkpoints looking for drunk drivers, people not using their seatbelts, and so on [4].

6. Special program in Iran

According to New Year holidays in Iran, many traveling are during that time and unfortunately many accidents are occurred, therefore police organs have a special program for twenty days from 16th of March to 4th of April every year, which contains increasing the number of policemen, speed cameras,
medical and rescue teams and also reinforcing the penalties to promote safety driving and reducing the number of accidents.

The national police agency claimed that, the 2009 New Year special program resulted in decreasing 10% of traffic accident fatalities and 30% in number of injuries compare to last New Year [6].

7. Overview of some new approaches

After 2006 some new strategies are applied for traffic safety such as increasing the policemen and speed cameras in the roads, Invisible control of the vehicles in the main roads and also improving rescue and medical system. Mandatory using of global position system (GPS) for the buses, between cities taxis and also trucks which carry explosive gas or chemicals, to check their speed.

The new system has dramatically diminished the incidence of collision.

Other approaches included distribution of leaflets and posters and through broad casting via television, radio, newspaper and also increasing the awareness of people by teaching from kindergarten to university and also in the mosques and companies.

A new system has been established to check the offenders last year histories and repeated offenders can be subjected to restriction of vehicle use [6].

In Japan on January 2006, the head of the task force on transportation released a statement indicating the government’s continued strong commitment to pursuing comprehensive traffic safety policies.

Future road traffic safety policies in Japan will be pursued within the framework of the Eighth Fundamental Traffic Safety Program, which was adopted on March 14, 2006. The new program states the government’s intention to redouble its efforts to reduce traffic fatalities. It goes on to commit the government to an even more robust effort to reduce the number of accidents per se; and, for the first time since Fundamental Traffic Safety Programs were begun, it establishes numerical objectives for the reduction of traffic casualties [2]. The decline in fatalities in Japan in recent years can be attributed largely efforts to carry out a comprehensive set of measures based on the Fundamental Traffic Safety Programs, including measures aimed at improving the road traffic environment, at disseminating and reinforcing messages on traffic safety, and at ensuring safe driving practices, and, in addition, measures aimed at advancing vehicle safety, preserving order on roads, and improving rescue and emergency medical systems. Certain quantitatively measurable improvements also contributed to this decline, including (1) increased seat belt usage, (2) lower pre-accident speeds, and (3) the effects of the Initiative for Stricter Drunk Driving Penalties and Other Measures against dangerous driving [3].

8. Conclusion

By over looking the results of special program in Iran, it can be understood that the best way to reduce the number of accident is to raise the awareness of the people by distribution of leaflets or through media and also increasing the penalties for the offenders and control the roads for high speed and dangerous driving.

Based on a respect for human life, the aim is eliminating all traffic accidents from society. Clearly, there is a need for further efforts to reduce the number of traffic fatalities, but in addition more robust measures must be adopted to reduce the number of accidents.

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