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## Review article

# Health and social consequences of road traffic accidents

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## ABSTRACT

Road traffic accidents are a serious problem worldwide. Although the Czech Republic, and also the European Union and the World Health Organization outlay resources to reduce the number of road traffic accidents, in 2015 an average of 1.8 people died daily and 59 people had their life or health affected. The consequences of road traffic accidents primarily affect the direct participants of road traffic accidents and their families. The direct participants of road traffic accidents particularly suffer health consequences. Due to the fact that road traffic accidents lead to a large number of fatal incapacitating injuries, the consequences of these accidents are fundamentally reflected in the social sphere. This concerns job losses and the related financial hardships, loss of amenity and a fatal impact on the functioning of the whole family. We should not forget that the psychological impact of the consequences of road traffic accidents do not only to affect the direct participants, but also their families. The costs associated with road traffic accidents are shouldered by the whole society. Although the Czech Republic provides assistance to the victims of road traffic accidents—financial, medical, or social, other European Union countries give these victims greater possibilities mainly through allowances and social measures. The aim of this study is to analyze the health and social consequences of road traffic accidents. The selected method of data processing was textual analysis of documents.

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## Introduction

Motor vehicles and motorized land transportation have been with us for over a hundred years, and this period has brought great changes both in the technology of vehicles and the

transport system [1]. The invention of the wheel can be considered a revolutionary advancement, which later became the basis for the multiplication of the number of wheels and the invention of the first vehicle [2]. The period of time when the transition from pre-modern to modern transport occurred

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cannot be accurately determined, but in the 18th century the development of transportation occurs also in our country, and in the first half of the 19th century, the pace of road construction further increases [3]. After 1989, social liberalization also led to the decline of discipline or respect for the applicable laws. It was the beginning of the import of used cars, of the increase of road traffic, and the decline of the quality of roads. These circumstances led to a permanent increase in the number of road traffic accidents [2].

In 2001, the index of mortality in the Czech Republic topped the European average by 16%, and in 2009 the indicator of societal losses caused by road traffic accidents in the Czech Republic was nearly 55 billion Czech crowns. This amount not only represents the monetary aspect, but reflects a wider criterion for the assessment of losses due to road traffic accidents; which also includes the human side – pain, suffering, mental distress and the like. [4]. But as Guria [5] stated, the cost of pain, suffering and loss of quality of life are very difficult to estimate or to assess their monetary value, because the real value of life and physical and mental abilities that are destroyed as a result of motor vehicle accidents cannot be objectively calculated. Under all of these circumstances, the Czech Republic adopted the National Road Safety Strategy 2011–2020, which aims to reduce by 2020 the number of road traffic deaths to the average level of the European countries, and to reduce by 40% the number of seriously injured victims [4].

In connection with road traffic accidents, I would like to highlight two of the most serious consequences – health and welfare. The most serious consequence of road traffic accidents is death or serious injury [2,6]. The most common injuries in road traffic accidents are head injuries [7,8]. Some time after a road traffic accident, the physical condition generally improves and eventually stabilizes or heals, but we tend to forget the psychological state of an individual after a road traffic accident, which often remains affected for a long time [9]. Long-term health problems may eventually encourage the rise of social problems. Among the social impacts of road traffic accidents we can mention financial difficulties [10]. Permanent health and financial problems play an important role in the development of posttraumatic stress disorder [9].

One of the most frequent consequences of road traffic accidents is musculoskeletal injury, which can also lead to permanent paralysis. Dealing with this situation is influenced by a number of behavioural and psychosocial factors, including social support, which contributes to improving the physical and mental state of a person after a road traffic accident and enable return to work [11]. Social support, i.e. the support of friends, family and close neighbours, is important for all individuals coping with difficult life situations. Enough social support gives us a different perspective on the situation or can help us find the right way. Conversely, a lack of social support is associated with the development of posttraumatic stress disorder and with social inclusion into normal life [11]. Because the vast majority of road traffic accidents currently occur due to unruly behaviour and an irresponsible attitude of road users, society had to proceed with the adoption of strict criminal laws [2].

My goal is to outline a concept of health and social consequences of road traffic accidents for individuals and also for the immediate neighbours.

## Materials and methods

Documents related to this issue were selected based on the keywords: road traffic accident, road traffic accident consequences, physical disability and victim of a road traffic accident.

Publications, which dealt with health and the social consequences of road traffic accidents, were selected from the EBSCO Discovery Service, Web of Science, Scopus and free Internet.

My intention was to analyze the issue of road traffic accidents on the basis of textual analysis of identified research studies and final university theses from two perspectives: health and social protection.

The literature research was carried out between April and June, 2016. Used publications were mostly of foreign origin. The research showed that as well as publications in the English language, there are also works in Slovak, Swedish, Spanish, Portuguese and Norwegian. They were mainly research studies published in professional journals and university final year projects inspired by the issue of the consequences of road traffic accidents. Only the publications in English and those related to the topic were subjected to the analysis. Abstracts of the contributions that were thoroughly studied and selected were those that were directly related to the issue. Because road traffic accidents can be evaluated from many angles, I focused on the most important consequences of road traffic accidents – health and welfare. From all the publications, I only used for the textual analysis those works whose authors dealt with the consequences of accidents from a health or social perspective.

## Results

### Definitions

A road traffic accident is an event on the road, such as a car crash or collision, which occurred or began on the road and involves death or injury of persons or damage to property in direct relation to the operation of a vehicle in motion [12]. Accidents cause damage to property, health, or even life, and the behaviour that preceded a road traffic accident almost always leads to legal responsibility [2]. Frequent offences committed in connection with a road traffic accident include death by negligence (Section 143 of the Criminal Code), grievous bodily harm (Section 147 of the Criminal Code), bodily harm by negligence (Section 158 of the Criminal Code), failure to provide aid by the driver of a vehicle (Section 151 of the Criminal Code) and endangerment under the influence of drugs (Section 274 of the Criminal Code) [13].

According to the World Health Organization, health is physical and mental well-being – an optimal state of health of a person which depends on a set of conditions that will enable the person to live and work so as to meet their realistic and biological possibilities [14]. For most people, health ranks in the foreground; for some from the very beginning, others may start to value their health when it is affected by an illness or an injury that is followed by health and social problems [15].

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