

Traffic Accidents - A Reading of the Theoretical Approaches to the Causes of the Phenomenon

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Abstract: Traffic accidents are one of the most prominent problems facing Algeria today as they are a phenomenon that has serious consequences for the individual and society, leaving human and material losses that exceed those caused by wars and conflicts accompanied by social, psychological and economic effects that impose heavy burdens on the state. Statistics and specialized studies, as well as civil protection data, indicate that the real death rate of traffic accidents is estimated at about one death per hour, and the percentage of deaths as a result of these accidents is taking an upward trajectory and is on a terrible rise. Faced by this worrying situation, which is nowadays described as road terrorism, it has become necessary to direct the attention to the study of the phenomenon and the identification of its causes. Our study will be concerned with theoretical approaches that addressed the issue of traffic accidents' causes from different angles.

Keywords: *Accidents, Traffic, Approach, Theory, Cause*

1. INTRODUCTION

As a result of the social change and technological advancements that humanity has reached today, which have affected most of the economic, educational, social, and political structures of society, there has been an emergence of many problems, including traffic accidents. Due to the multiplicity and intertwining of the traffic issue elements, traffic accidents is a phenomenon that has become one of the most important and vital issues in our lives today in its various aspects and with its social, economic and safety effects, as traffic accidents are on the rise which is a problem that countries worldwide without exception suffer from in varying degrees given the scope of the human and material costs resulting from said accidents and their social and economic effects on the life of the individual and society.

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Consequently, many scholars and researchers in the field of traffic regulation have been interested in the phenomenon in order to find ways to reduce it, or at least minimize its effects, which the World Health Organization (WHO) has come to call the "disease of the age", and on which we must seriously work to eradicate.

Study Problem

Traffic accidents today have become a widespread phenomenon in all contemporary societies due to the change that cities have witnessed and the expansion of the road network to facilitate the movement of citizens in order to carry out their daily preoccupations, and the increase in their severity and the increase of their rates week after week alongside the difficulty of controlling and reducing them.

This necessitates research into its causes and the factors leading to it based on its theoretical explanations. How did social, psychological, and experimental theories explain the causes of traffic accidents?

Study Aim

This study aims to identify the intellectual and theoretical frameworks that attempted to explain the causes of work accidents, regardless of their scientific specializations.

Study Approach

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, through which we have been able to know the different theoretical trends that have tried to explain the causes of traffic accidents.

2. Sociological Theoretical Trends

Through a social perspective, traffic accidents are one of the most prominent causes of death, especially among young people, without exempting the elderly and children from their effects. Human, vehicle, and environment are considered inseparable elements, a defect in one or all of them leads to serious consequences for the individual and society. The human factor, whether it be the driver or the pedestrian, may be an important element to achieve traffic safety and order, but many obstacles of social origin emerge through the social values affecting the behavior of individuals leading to the obstruction of the flow of traffic and sometimes to traffic accidents. This is why the theory focuses on the most important social values that can affect the behavior of the individual and lead them to serious consequences, the most important of which are:

▪ **The Culture of Time**

This is where the sociological theory believes that the delayed set off of some vehicle owners makes them race against the clock due to a lack of time, hoping to compensate for the time difference through extra speed, or disregarding traffic lights and other unsafe behaviors, which can often lead the owner to an accident.

Hence, the problem of not realizing the concept of time arises, especially with the development of urban societies and their accompanying overcrowding and congestion in traffic, despite the multiple road network, and the large number of daily preoccupations of the individual such as work trips, shopping, and bringing children from school...etc, in addition to other daily activities carried out by each individual—all of which is related to time. One finds oneself forced to do all said activities in one day, thus fighting the value of time, which is something not understood and not adapted by the social values of the Algerian citizen in particular who, in order to do everything, may exceed the speed limit or run traffic lights or neglect the vehicle's inspection due to time constraints—all of which exposes him and others to danger. (Mohamed, 1970, p43)

▪ **Social Status**

According to sociological theory, the disparity in social status may make a person experience a lot of psychological pressure that gets translated into unsafe behaviors, and since the car has become part of the social features, it reflects the social class to which each individual belongs and therefore the power of their car is what determines their position in the social structure. (Boltonski,1975 ,p30)

▪ **Insufficient Knowledge about the Nature of Vehicles**

Today, the car has become a source of threat to the safety of others,(Al-Wahid, 1998, p56) whether pedestrians or passengers, due to the misuse or the ignorance of all its elements, as vehicles are exposed to neglect and lack of maintenance measures because most drivers do not monitor their cars except in the event of a defect—a defect that even sometimes prevents them from driving—and this means that there is a category of drivers that lack the application of preventive maintenance measures.

▪ **Preventive Driving Styles**

This refers to the necessary degree of caution that the driver must have even if the danger does not materialize, as the driver must always be vigilant and discerning while driving the car everywhere, whether in neighborhoods, or on

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highways. However, it is noticeable that being cautious is one of the beliefs that Arab societies do not pay much attention to because of their strong belief in fate and destiny, and that traffic accidents are written in destiny. Here we cannot overlook another category in society, which is the category of young people, many of whom do not use seat belts to avoid the ridicule that they can be exposed to by their colleagues, ignoring the danger that they may face as a result of this behavior, or of their rush or of their neglect of the value and importance of the matter, as they only wear seat belts when they see police officers.

▪ The Cultural Gap between Human Values and the Vehicle's Conditions of Use

Sociological theory believes that among the causes that lead to traffic accidents is the cultural gap between human values and the conditions of use of the vehicle, which leads to a situation in which the roads witness unfortunate accidents that take innocent lives, or result in human injuries, permanent disabilities, and material losses.(El Farissi, 1990).

Perhaps the major imbalance that led to this cultural gap is the technological advancement that was accompanied by progress in the material aspects of society, such as traffic systems and the values of dealing with the vehicle and with others. The issue of moral backwardness remains an obstacle to benefiting from technological data, including the car, and the reason is due to the lack of social preparation before the transfer of techniques, because technological change needs a small amount of money and a short period of time for transportation, while the transfer of social values to keep pace with technology takes a long time, and it also needs the concerted efforts of the state's media and social services, and other community forces for traffic awareness and education.

This theory focused on the social aspects that cause traffic accidents, perhaps the first of which is the human factor as the driver whose non adherence to various social values such as not understanding the concept of time; not being knowledgeable about vehicle components; not following a preventive driving style; and not being aware of traffic culture all fall into social behaviours that lead the driver to committing traffic accidents.

3. Psychological Theoretical Approaches

This theory considers that the psychological factor is one of the fundamental causes of traffic accidents, in addition to some human behaviors that are acquired and grown within the society in which the individual lives, and therefore a person

has attitudes and habits on the basis of which they performs some behaviors that may lead them to a traffic accident based on:

- **Aggressiveness**

The psychological theory confirms that aggression as a behavior appears in the individual when they have a difficulty adapting to a certain situation. When a driver faces a difficulty in traffic, their aggressiveness appears and we can distinguish the hostile driver through their exaggerated dynamics, which emerges through their behavior to assert themselves in front of traffic difficulties, and this behavior can push the individual to violate traffic laws, to make a dangerous overtaking, or to perform dangerous maneuvers, and with all these aggressive movements and behaviors, the probability of getting into a traffic accident is increased.

- **Selfishness**

Selfishness is apparent with some drivers who try to take the right of others to use the road without caring about the traffic that they can obstruct. Here, the drivers find themselves unable to put themselves in the shoes of others and this is done by looking at the problems they face in traffic according to their personality traits only, which leads them to commit isolated and abnormal acts; for example, driving in the middle of the road at high speed without leaving others the right to overtake, parking the car in places where parking is not allowed, parking the car in a place that causes an inconvenience to people and obstructs traffic, or exposes other cars to the risk of collision.

- **Anxiety**

The theory considers that the individual often experiences moments of anxiety while driving, which generates stress and psychological distress that causes tension.

Here, the anxious driver shows some indications and behaviors, such as agitation and confusion, and in this case they cannot make the right decision at the right time, which leads them to increase the likelihood of making the wrong decision which in turn increases the occurrence of traffic accidents.

- **Mind Wandering**

Among the dangerous situations that push drivers to get into traffic accidents is the wandering of their minds and the diversion of their attention from the road to other different thoughts. Among the dangers of the road is also what is

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called "hypnosis", which is caused by cases of nervous fatigue, and driving for long distances on similar roads where there are no significant changes in scenery, such as desert roads.

Tiredness and not having enough rest before making long trips also lead to real dangers. In this case, the mind wandering becomes the result of a subconscious defense against tiredness. This is why at any sign of tiredness or mind wandering; drivers should stop their cars to rest, because this tiredness increases with the intensity and duration of driving

The psychological theory also confirms that the psychological factor is one of the fundamental causes of traffic accidents, because human actions are affected by psychological factors and thus express repressed desires.

Accepting this saying eliminates the fact that individuals are rational beings who can control their desires and break their shackles, as they live in a society that influences and affects them. Therefore, it can be said that the individual can at least avoid some accidents that result from some individual actions.

▪ **Psychoanalysis**

This theory relies in its interpretations on deliberate actions subconsciously, and the proponents of this theory believe that the physical injury caused by the accident is a subconscious aggression directed at the self, and that most accidents are expressions of nervous conflicts, and that self-punishment is one of the compounds on which the causation of the accident is based.

This theory does not take into account the many factors that lead to the occurrence of a traffic accident, and it also exaggerates the importance of psychological factors as a cause of the traffic accident, and although the role of these factors is recognized, it should not be exaggerated and the causes of the accident should not be limited to them, although the importance of mental health must be taken into account as a procedure for obtaining a driving license.

4. Fatalism Theory

The proponents of this theory believe that individuals are divided into lucky and unfortunate. The first category has immunity from accidents, and the second category is more susceptible to it, and this theory explains the occurrence of traffic accidents based on fate.

This theory is contrary to Islam, which calls for trust, making use of available means, and having faith when confronting the traffic problem.

5. Experimental Theoretical Approaches

5.1. Medical (Scientific) Theory

This theory indicates that a person constantly injured suffers from a physical or neurological defect, and that this defect is the cause of the accident.

This theory is flawed because it limits the causes of the traffic accident to personal factors only, but at the same time it is correct in terms of its recognition of these factors, because the health condition of the driver may lead to the accident. So the medical examination of the driver from the organic and psychological aspects should be a preliminary procedure to obtain a driving license, and this represents a procedure for studying in schools and is not included in the driving training program.

5.2. Experimental Theory

This theory indicates that accidents have multiple causes, some of which are related to humans, and some of which are outside their scope and borders, and this theory is the closest to correctness, although it did not take into account the importance of traffic awareness programs and human respect for the system and responsibility. Behavioral errors in driving leading to accidents are due either to a behavioral habit that is due to common way of driving among drivers, or to some social and demographic variables.

However, there is an important yet overlooked aspect which is the driver's personality itself because driving is a human behaviour above all else. Every driver has his own way of behaving; not all drivers have the same behaviours while driving.

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All of these theories that were brought up attempted to present the reasons that lead to committing traffic accidents, but they differ in their exposition. The social theory focused on the social aspects that cause traffic accidents, and perhaps the first of them is the human factor, being the driver, and when he does not align with social values, such as not understanding the concept of time and the social change experienced by cities and the road network, in addition to drivers' ignorance of preventive driving methods and lack of respect for traffic rules. As for the psychological theory, it attributed it to psychological factors related to the driver himself, such as aggression, anxiety, selfishness, and absent-mindedness. As for the fatalistic theory, it attributed traffic accidents to fate and destiny, and

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that it is something that a person is destined to commit an accident. The scientific medical theory, on the other hand, saw that the reason for committing traffic accidents is due to the driver suffering from physical or neurological conditions. As for the experimental theory, it saw that accidents have multiple causes, some of which are related to humans, and some of which are outside humans' scope and limits.

Each theory tried to provide an explanation for the causes of traffic accidents based on its field of expertise; the focus, therefore, was on specific aspects with the rest of the aspects that have to do with the driver committing traffic accidents being neglected. Through these theoretical trends, we managed to identify the causes of traffic accidents, whether social, psychological, or even those related to the driver's person and safety from physical and neurological diseases, and we were able to know that all of these factors are involved in committing traffic accidents.

6. CONCLUSION

Traffic accidents are a social phenomenon of which the causes are intertwined and overlapping. They may occur as a result of social factors, such as the absence of the culture of time for the driver or pedestrian, or the lack of knowledge of the nature of the vehicle, or the failure to follow the preventive driving style. Accidents may also be the result of psychological factors, such as anxiety, aggression, and mind wandering, or the result of factors related to the body of the person driving or using the road. Traffic culture, however, remains the most important factor through which we can confront this phenomenon with all its risks and repercussions on the individual and society.

Therefore, the various institutions of social upbringing, including schools, mosques, and the media, must take upon themselves the responsibility of spreading traffic education among individuals and in society. That is without neglecting the role of social control institutions, led by the police, civil protection and various civil society associations in raising awareness about the seriousness of this phenomenon, and spreading a traffic culture among all segments of society to avoid traffic accidents.

- The Algerian school and all those responsible for the national education sector must work to educate students about the danger of traffic accidents in order to create a traffic culture, by allocating lessons within the curriculum and carrying out extracurricular activities on the subject
- The various media outlets must address the issue through discussion and analysis by giving platforms to specialists through which they can educate

citizens and spread a traffic culture. Awareness campaigns must also be intensified through brochures and advertising flashes

- The official protection institutions, including the national gendarmerie, the police, and the civil protection, should step up sensitization campaigns so that drivers and pedestrians realize the seriousness of the phenomenon.
- The need for good driving training in driving schools, with all trainees being subject to a medical examination before accepting the training file.
- The various civil society associations that have competence in this area should pay more attention to this phenomenon as part of their practical programme, and should get closer to citizens and drivers in order to make them aware of the seriousness of the phenomenon.

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