[**Deadly drivers**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1738455/deadly-drivers)

[Rafia Zakaria](https://www.dawn.com/authors/410/rafia-zakaria) Published February 22, 2023

The writer is an attorney teaching constitutional law and political philosophy.

Listen to article

IT was around 10 in the morning of Friday, Feb 8, 2023 when the phone rang in a home in Islamabad. The woman who answered it had no idea it was a phone call that would change her life. On the other end was a police officer who had the worst news imaginable. Her eldest son, 29 years old, had been killed in a road accident in front of a well-known school in F-7/3. The motorcycle he had been riding had been hit by a speeding car. Photos of the crash attest to its severity, the motorcycle so mangled that its form is barely recognisable. If metal could be mangled in such a way, then imagine just how deadly the force of a speeding car with a heedless driver at the wheel must have been on a human body.

Sadly, this was only the beginning of the nightmare. When the mother and other family members reached the police station, they were told that the culprit had not been arrested, but had been provided bail before arrest. As is often the case with these deadly drivers, the culprit belongs to an influential family. Entitlement, it seems, encourages them to pay no mind at all to the lives of others on the road. If the loss of her eldest son was not terrible enough, the police refused to allow the family access to the deceased without writing an application, a ridiculous request given the devastation of the moment. Even though the culprit had admitted to being at fault, Islamabad Police said they would be conducting their own ‘investigation’ even as the accused roamed free and would be able to abscond to some place where he could evade arrest.

In the meantime, the mother had to beg the school in front of which the accident happened for the CCTV footage that could show how the incident happened. The police had access to its own CCTV footage but that has never been shared.

The family of the deceased is dealing with double devastation. There is the terrifying trauma of a young son and brother being killed. Then there is the additional devastation from the apathy of the police and the impunity with which the children of the influential and wealthy elite literally run over everyone else. Even if justice is ever served it will be met with a shrug and a nod and some statement about how punishing the accused will not bring back the deceased.

The sons of the wealthy treat the country’s roads like a videogame — the pedestrians and motorcyclists they mow down are not real people to them.

This is not an isolated case in this country, which has the dubious position of having the most road fatalities in Asia. Unsurprisingly, a study conducted in Karachi revealed that the majority of fatalities in road traffic accidents between 2007 and 2014 were drivers of motorbikes and bicycles. The second highest number of fatalities was among pedestrians. Studies have found that there is an immediate need to utilise technology to deter speeding in the country but, as the example here reveals, even when evidence may be present it is either too difficult to access or knowingly suppressed by those who are sheltering powerful people.

A 2021 study titled Empirical Assessment of Factors Influencing Injury Severities of Motor Vehicle Crashes on the National Highways of Pakistan recommended the 4Es approach to reducing the severity of crashes on the country’s highways. The 4Es stand for ‘engineering, enforcement, education and emergency services’. Even reading this list makes one’s heart sink because none of these are a priority in the country and it appears they never will be. Where ‘enforcement’ does occur, most people that are stopped and issued challans are once again the most vulnerable — those on motorbikes and in small cars which the police calculate will be easy to squeeze for a bribe. I have never seen or heard of a speeding car breaking traffic rules having been apprehended by traffic police or the driver arrested for reckless driving. As one can see from the example presented at the outset and of thousands more instances (according to statistics), even when an innocent person is killed, there is no effort made to punish those responsible.

A lawless country has lawless roads. People are routinely arrested for criticising the government, even sometimes done away with if they are calling out the powerful. The sons of the wealthy treat the country’s roads like a videogame — the pedestrians and motorcyclists they mow down are not real people to them.

According to the highway study cited here, the probability of major injury to the victims increases when the crash occurs on a horizontal curve, in the months of July and November, on Tuesday, and during cloudy weather. The annual number of deaths from road accidents in 2018 was nearly 36,000 people. It can safely be assumed that the number since then has only increased. No one knows the details of these deaths, the majority of which are undoubtedly those of pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and rickshaws. In other words, the country’s poor embark on the country’s roads at their peril. If there are any actual investigations into these thousands of deaths, they are never heard of.

According to the sister of the deceased in the Islamabad incident earlier this month, the police was rude and evasive, not at all touched by the family’s suffering. Undoubtedly, this is the scenario in every case. Those who want justice are thwarted at every step while those who have power pay no heed to their suffering. If you are not one of the powerful and you want to drive in Pakistan, it must be done with the awareness that your life does not matter and as the 36,000 statistic attests, neither will your death.

*The writer is an attorney teaching constitutional law and political philosophy.*
[rafia.zakaria@gmail.com](https://mailto:rafia.zakaria@gmail.com)

*Published in Dawn, February 22nd, 2023*