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A Statistical Tribute to Several Late Globally Recognised Leaders in Road Safety Prior to the United Nations and Australian Road Safety Weeks

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Abstract
Road safety is not only statistical and I've mentioned some leaders whom have had Australian and global influence whom have passed, but I also speak highly of the dear Tuk-tuk drivers with lived experience whom treated us so very well despite their poverty. Road traffic safety is an important topic all year round, regardless of when road safety awareness week is held.

Keywords: United Nations, Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP), Australia

Introduction

I was privileged to attend the Safety 2024 conference in India presenting on cycling safety, particularly as it relates to collisions with pedestrians [also awarded by the International Safety Media Awards] [1]. I also have a previous award from the organisation in 2022 listed under road safety, which includes manuscript details relating to the necessity for motorcyclists to wear helmets [2]. At the safety conference I noted a photographic postcard exhibition honouring five late injury prevention leaders including two road safety leaders [Gayle Di Pietro- former Global Road Safety Program Manager; Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP) and Gary Liddle- Former Chief Executive of VicRoads, both of whom were well known in Australia and globally for their research [3, 4]. Their faces were on the postcard front, while on the reverse side there was space to write, after which you could put these postcards into a jar, thus forming a tribute. I also met Somya from the Ecom express exhibitor booth whom demonstrated the wonderful road safety props/placards.

This tribute in India included two road safety experts so after reflecting upon this, when I returned to Australia, in 2025, I prepared a poster tribute which was presented at the Australian Society for Medical Research Victorian Annual Scientific Meeting. It was a statistical tribute to the late Professors; John Hopper [JH], Chris Del Mar [CDM], Chris Silagy [CS], Rick Speare [RS], Henry Krum [HK] while the last was a Dr, Charles Gabel [CG]. This tribute differed in nature but honoured their lives regardless of whether they passed on the roads or due to illness or other causes. The late Prof. Rick Speare died in a car accident on 5th June 2016 while heading to Cairns to teach parasitology [5]. While I did not design postcards honouring these people as per the postcards that honoured road safety leaders such as the late Gayle Di Pietro and Gary Liddle being those that I saw in India, I was able to honour those mentioned on my poster, including as I said the late Prof. Rick Speare who tragically passed in a road traffic accident.

Rather than creating postcards, I located on ResearchGate and worksites statistical summaries presenting research highlights. A Medline publication search of scientists' life expectancy ["Life Expectancy"[Mesh] AND researchers] enabled a life course comparison. On ResearchGate [RG] profiles [CDM, in memory of RS, CG], article tallies included [CDM; 537], [RS; 271] and [CG; 86]. [JH; University of Melbourne; 1511], [HK; Monash University > 500], [CS; University of South Australia - 26 publications]. In total; 2931 research articles. Citations; CDM-24,340; RS google scholar-25,139; CS-770; CG- 1,565; JH-89,650 and HK-56,015 [Total; 197,479 citations [min-770; max-89,650]. The average age of these researcher's passing was 63.3 yrs [min 41; max 74]. Life expectancy varies for indeterminate reasons and maybe expected or unexpected and/or random [like a random number generator].

I also included a life course comparison. This was with a manuscript that reported on the mean age of death (MAD) and longevity for 54,256 men researchers working in physics, chemistry, medicine and biology, mathematics, economics, and humanities [Russian/USSR scientist's data;1724-2013] [6]. They reported the minimum MAD for mathematicians;72.1y, maximum MAD for economic scientists; 74.6y and that the MAD was 3.5y higher for scientists involved in university teaching thus showing intense scientific work increases longevity.

This work demonstrated that statisticians strive to comprehend, decipher, analyse and report on relevant and significant research findings, yet they are not immune to disease, illness, accidents and/or misfortune so they too can pass.

Road safety was paramount in our minds as we travelled in Tuk-tuks in India. One driver learnt to drive <13yo, teaching himself. His vehicle had dints, no seat belts and no air bags. He also entertained us with commentary.. We were exposed to Indian road hazards as both pedestrians and passengers. In fact, a confronting photograph that we took of an ambulance being blocked attempting to negotiate six lanes of traffic was so impressive that this was recently displayed as part of an exhibition in Melbourne.

Statistical research leaders have long worldwide research impact for centuries regardless of whether they worked in road safety research or general injury prevention. Life and practical experience are of paramount importance also in terms of preventing road traffic fatalities. The Tuk-tuk drivers made a mammoth lasting impact upon us as they safety drove my husband and I giving commentary on landmarks and telling us stories of how they learnt to drive. It reminded me that I learnt to drive in a paddock alongside a ditch, with my dear late grandfather guiding me carefully. Road safety awareness for these drivers maybe less theoretical with statistics, but more practical skills as they weave and dart in and out of traffic lanes, constantly tooting, negotiating past buses, motorcycles, pedestrians and carts remaining positive, informative and entertaining with their commentary as they drive 'basic taxis'.

The World Health Organization (WHO)'s South-East Asia Regional Status Report on Road Safety indicates that this region is home to over a quarter of the world's population [7]. The mortality in the region due to road traffic accidents, equates to 28% of global road traffic deaths.

India is the world's most populous country, with the second-largest road network and it ranks first in terms of road accident fatalities and disabilities. The disability and post-accident ramifications outcomes in India are unacceptable [8]. Annually, around 1.2 million families are directly impacted by accidents in India. Road Safety Awareness Week in India for 2026 will be observed from February 4 to February 10, focusing on promoting road safety and reducing accidents.

Other countries such as Qatar, at the national level have focused on the decade of action for road safety with a focus on meeting specific sustainable developmental goals [9]. Sustainable development goal 3.6 aims to reduce the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents. That particular abstract which was a late registration abstract for the Safety conference stated that the goals and action plans include aiming for a fatal and non-fatal decrease of 50% by 2030.

The Bloomberg Initiative for Global Road Safety (BIGRS) aims to reduce excessive speeding as this is a major risk factor for road traffic crashes and in particular one city benefiting from this technical assistance is Accra city [10]. The initiative includes embedding in the road loop detectors which can measure speeds continuously during the year.

We must remember horrific misfortunes can target innocent victims. In Australia, we give remembrance to victims of road fatalities during National Road Safety Week 2026 which is 17 to 24th May [11]. It is an annual initiative from the Safer Australian Roads and Highways (SARAH) Group, partnering road safety organisations and Government. The United Nations Global Road Safety Week is from May 8 to 12. It is a special global road safety campaign hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO) [12]. The awareness campaign is designed to educate communities about road safety and accident prevention. Globally around 1.3 million people die on the world's roads each year, while another 20 to 50 million people are injured yearly.

The safety conference was a superb and exceptionally incredible opportunity to learn of the research globally and I have included just several key findings from abstracts presented. I would highly recommend for anyone to attend a future conference such as this. As tourists we also learnt firsthand from locals whom negotiate traffic in their tuk-tuks, preventing road traffic accidents in a vastly different style as compared to understanding research. It is more a moment-by-moment avoidance of accidents approach 'requiring quick manoeuvring' as a result of tooting, weaving and avoiding vehicles. The comparison and complementary equation of research and lived driving experience is summed up well by this quote below.

Life it is not just a series of calculations and a sum total of statistics, it's about experience, it's about participation, it is something more complex and more interesting than what is obvious. Daniel Libeskind

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