

SAFE SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION IN INDIA

Author:Er Mubashir Jan

Abstract:

Every day around the world, the lives of more than 2000 families are torn apart by the loss of a child to an unintentional injury or accident that could have been prevented⁵. The grief that these families suffer – mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents and friends – is immeasurable. For India, with a population of 548 million children under the age of 18 years⁶, road safety becomes a high-priority. However, despite the fact that children use roads as pedestrians, cyclists, pillion-riders, vehicle passengers, etc., the road environment is rarely developed to consider their needs.

A study by NIMHANS India reported that about 2% of injured children were likely to become permanently disabled. The study indicated a strong association between road injuries among children, mode of travel, and distance to school.⁹ With one of the highest shares in road crash deaths all over the world, children in India are exposed to the risk of road crashes on multiple occasions.

There are no existing standard guidelines for modes of transport such as privately rented cabs, auto-rickshaws etc. creating a gap in ensuring safety of children in these vehicles. While there are state policies that have listed standards for school vehicles, there is neither a comprehensive national nor a state school transport policy in place to ensure that children travel safely to and from schools throughout all modes of transport. Thus, there is a need for drastic improvement in child safety w.r.t. school commute. Despite daily drills and E challaning the gap exists.

Objectives of the study:

The primary objective of the study is to assess knowledge, attitude, perception and behaviour of target respondents with respect to child road safety and transport for school commute.

Research Objectives:

1. Identify the existing guidelines for safety in school commute, and the adherence to these guidelines in practice.
2. To review the current status and conditions of school transport for children in India by various modes of school transport used like school buses, vans, RTVs etc; safety, security and comfort of the vehicle chosen for commute etc.
3. Assess the vulnerability of children vis-a-vis different modes of transport (buses, vans, auto rickshaws or children as pedestrians) while factoring in the additional risk of the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Offer suggestions/recommendations at both the individual and institutional level to improve safety of children commuting to schools, and reduce child crash deaths.

An Overview:

India is home to over 500 million children under the age of 18 years (Census, 2011). Road crashes are the leading cause of deaths and unintentional injuries amongst children, making them one of the most high-risk vulnerable sections of the population on Indian roads. Children are exposed to the risk of road crashes on multiple occasions while commuting to schools - in school affiliated vehicles, in private vehicles, as pedestrians, and on public transport.

The latest data from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) reveals that 11,168 children below the age of 18 lose their lives to road crashes, contributing to 7.4% of all crash deaths. In addition, 13,185 people die near schools/colleges/educational institution areas .

What adds complexity to these disturbing trends is the fact that for over 26 crore students enrolled in school between 2015-16 (26,05,97,000) (HRD Ministry, 2018) , little is known about their commute to school.

There are no existing uniform legal guidelines that ensure the safety of children during their school commute.

Factors like poor road infrastructure, relatively unsafe vehicles, limited enforcement, and bad road-user behaviour contribute to the everyday risks faced by school children while commuting. Such risks are faced in both school affiliated and private transport. In 2019, 362 people including children lost their lives in road crashes involving school buses. There is documented proof also to show non-compliance on part of school vehicles.

According to the latest 2024 electronic Detailed Accident Report (e-DAR), out of the total 570,000 road accidents in India, 4.6% occurred in school zones, including colleges.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR — AN ANALYSIS:

The success and economic development of nations are determined by their educational systems. Since independence, India has been continuously progressing in the education field. There is a direct relationship between school infrastructure and educational performance. People's access to education depends crucially on the educational infrastructure in place. Therefore, the government continuously invests in educational infrastructure to improve educational outcomes in the school education system.

The school education system in India is one of the largest in the world, comprising more than 14.89 lakh schools, 95 lakh teachers, and over 26.52 crore students from varied socio-economic backgrounds across 28 States and 8 Union Territories (UDISE+ Report, 2021-22).

In India, the “Unified District Information System for Education Plus” (UDISE+), an application developed by the government under the Ministry of Education, collects information from all recognized and unrecognized schools that impart formal education from pre-primary to higher secondary level.

Using the data available at Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) for the year 2021-22, this article aims to understand the state of available infrastructure in the school education system in the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOLS AND ENROLMENTS BY MANAGEMENT :

The school education system of Jammu and Kashmir comprises 28.80 thousand schools, 1.67 Lakh teachers, and 27.18 Lakh students. Figure 1 provides information about the distribution of schools by different types of

management. In the Indian education system, schools are categorized into four types of management; government, government-aided, private unaided, and others.

Government schools are run by the government, government-aided schools are run by private management but with rules and regulations of the government, and private unaided schools are entirely governed by private management. In the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, “government” schools account for 80 percent, and “private unaided” schools constitute 20 percent of total schools.

The “government-aided” and “other” schools are negligible in the Union Territory. Compared with the distribution of schools in the country as a whole, the UT is ahead of the country as a whole in the share of government schools and behind in the privatization of school education, though by a small margin in the latter case.

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EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION BUS:

(i) As per Section 2 (47) of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, an educational institution bus is a transport vehicle which requires a permit to ply on road. Permits are granted by the State Governments with various terms and conditions. Such vehicles also need to undergo mandatory fitness test without which the permit cannot be renewed.

Section 192A of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 prescribes penalties for using vehicle without permit.

(ii) The sub-rule (2) of rule 125C of Central motor Vehicles Rules, 1989 mandates that the testing and approval for the body building of school buses shall be in accordance with AIS:063-2005, as amended from time to time for vehicles mentioned therein. Further, this Ministry vide G.S.R. 367(E) dated 13th April, 2018 has mandated that all school buses shall be fitted with Fire Detection Alarm System (FDAS) and Fire Detection Suppression System (FDSS) meeting the requirements of AIS-135 and AIS:153.

Furthermore, this Ministry vide G.S.R. 48(E) dated the 27th January, 2022 has notified that the type III buses of category M3 [a motor vehicle used for carriage of passengers, comprising nine or more seats in addition to the

driver's seat and having a Gross Vehicle Weight exceeding five tonnes] and school buses shall also comply with fire Alarm and protection system in occupant compartment as per AIS-135.

(iii) Section 190 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 prescribes penalties for using vehicle in unsafe condition. Sub-section 2 of Section 190 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 stipulates that any person who drives or causes or allow to be driven, in any public place a motor vehicle, which violates the standards prescribed in relation to road safety, control of noise and air-pollution, shall be punishable for the first offence with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months, or with fine which may extend to ten thousand rupees or with both and he shall be disqualified for holding licence for a period of three months and for any second or subsequent offence with imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine which may extend to ten thousand rupees or with both.

FAMILY/SELF DRIVEN MODE OF TRANSPORT-(MT/NMT)

Many children commute to school by either personal vehicles, or by walking, yet little is known about this aspect of their journey. Owing to the choice of mode of commute, the responsibility of ensuring safety for the child during commute is borne largely by the parents, with the government and schools playing a supporting role.

However, schools play a vital role in ensuring the safety of children at school zones, particularly for those who are pedestrians and non motorised transport users. As schools reopen, it is expected that many parents will shift their children to self/ family driven modes of transport as they are the safest for social distancing norms.

Therefore, it is essential for parents to also adhere to road safety guidelines while their child is commuting to and from school. Additional measures need to be taken to ensure safety of children at school zones.

It is essential for the schools and the government to ensure that adequate infrastructure is provided at school zones, so that children can safely commute while maintaining social distancing. Enforcement measures near school zones should be stricter to minimise exposure of children to moving traffic.

Further, schools should deploy traffic marshals to assist children in crossing roads safely in the school zones.

NON-AVAILABILITY OF SCHOOL AFFILIATED TRANSPORTATION: Although millions of children travel to school everyday, many schools do not provide the option of school affiliated transport. Around 48% of the children did not have the option of school affiliated transportation. In a city-wise analysis, in Delhi (59%), Ahmedabad (76%), Chennai (61%), Mumbai,(J&K 65%)

SCHOOL ZONE INFRASTRUCTURE:AS PER IRC PROTOCOLS:

The IRC Protocol for Safe School Zones refers to guidelines provided by the Indian Roads Congress (IRC) for ensuring the safety of school children in areas near or within school premises. **These guidelines are part of the IRC 99: Guidelines for Traffic Calming Measures in Urban and Rural Areas**

“Manual on Road Safety for Children”, and supported by other IRC codes such as IRC:35, IRC:67, and IRC:103.

Here's a summarized version of the IRC Protocol for Safe School Zones:

IRC Protocol: Safe School Zones

1. Safe Zone Planning & Design

• School Zone Definition:

Area around a school where special safety measures are required, typically within 150 m radius from the school gate.

• Signage:

- IRC:67 compliant school warning signs (triangular signs with a symbol of children crossing).
- Fluorescent yellow-green background for high visibility.
- “SCHOOL AHEAD” signage placed 150 m before the school gate.

• Speed Limit:

- Speed restrictions to 20–25 km/h in the school zone.
- Enforced using speed limit signs and rumble strips.

• Traffic Calming Measures:

- Raised pedestrian crossings.
- Rumble strips, speed humps as per IRC:99-1988.
- Chicanes or road narrowings near gates.

2. Pedestrian Infrastructure

• Footpaths:

- Minimum 1.5 m wide, continuous, obstacle-free.
- Height and width as per IRC:103-2012.

• Pedestrian Crossings:

- Zebra crossings with clear thermoplastic paint and raised platforms.
- Located at school gate and nearby intersections.
- Guardrails and bollards to guide pedestrian movement.

• School Crossing Guards:

- Trained personnel at peak hours to help children cross safely.

3. Drop-off and Pick-up Zones

- Separate zones for buses, private vehicles, and auto-rickshaws.
- No stopping zones near pedestrian crossings.
- Queuing areas with marked bays.

4. Parking & Encroachment Control

- No-parking zones near school entrances.
- Hawker-free zones in front of the gate.
- Regular enforcement and barricading.

5. School Transport Safety

- Buses must comply with AIS-063 and CMVR guidelines.
- Display SCHOOL BUS signage with route info.
- Mandatory presence of:
 - Speed governors (max 40 km/h)
 - Attendants

- CCTV, fire extinguishers, and first aid kits

6. Awareness & Education

- Road safety clubs in schools.
- Regular training for students and transport staff.
- Collaboration with traffic police and local municipal bodies.

7. Enforcement & Monitoring

- Periodic Road safety audits in school zones.
- Involvement of RTO, Traffic Police, School Management, and Parent groups.
- Installation of CCTV surveillance where ever possible.

SCHOOL BUS GUIDELINES: AIS 063: HONBLE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA GUIDELINES:

The Government of India felt the need for a permanent agency to expedite the publication of standards and development of test facilities in parallel when the work on the preparation of the standards is going on, as the development of improved safety critical parts can be undertaken only after the publication of the standard and commissioning of test facilities.

To this end, the Ministry of Surface Transport (MOST) has constituted a permanent Automotive Industry Standard Committee (AISC) vide order No. RT-11028/11/97-MVL dated September 15, 1997.

The standards prepared by AISC was approved by the permanent CMVR Technical Standing Committee (CTSC). After approval, the Automotive Research Association of India, (ARAI), Pune, being the secretariat of the AIS Committee, has published this standard. For better dissemination of this information ARAI may publish this document on their Web site.

The need was felt to specially address the requirements pertaining to school buses, giving importance to the safety of school children.

This standard lays down the specific requirements for school buses and would be a necessary adjunct to the “Code of Practice for Bus Body Design and Approval – AIS-052 (Rev. 1).” The compositions of Automotive Industry Standards Committee (AISC) for Vehicles with GVW of more than 3.5 tonnes and Permanent Automotive Industry Standards Committee responsible for preparation of this amalgamation of standard are given in Annexure I and II respectively.

Requirements for School Buses:

1. SCOPE: This standard lays down special requirements for school buses over and above the requirements laid for buses in “AIS-052 Code of Practice for Bus Body Design and Approval”. The standard shall apply to buses with a seating capacity of 13 passengers and above excluding driver meant for transporting school children to and from school.

These additional requirements are being laid down for the following reasons.

- (i) To maximize safety and minimize severity of injuries.
- (ii) To take care of specific needs related to school going children.

Standard Requirements for School Buses in India

- All school buses in India are mandated to have an external colour of Golden Yellow. This colour shall be as per IS 5 -1994 (as amended from time to time)
- For Identification, a band of 150mm wide of 'Golden Brown 'colour might be provided on all sides of the bus below the window level
- Two emergency exits are mandatory on all school buses in India. One on the rear half of the bus on the right hand side and on the rear side of the bus. Children should be trained to operate these doors.
- Whenever the bus passenger door or one of the emergency exits is open, the bus should be incapable of motion. The driver should get an indication of the doors being open by means of flashing light/buzzer or other suitable means.
- The lowest footstep height shall not be more than 220mm from ground. The bus should be incapable of motion without folding or retracting the steps
- All seats other than the ones facing the passenger step well should be forward facing. Also, a partition should be provided to the seat facing the step well.
- Stopping signals, a hazard warning and a stop signal arm should operate whenever the passenger door opens.
- A tamper-proof speed governor that complies with the requirements of Rule 118 of CMV (A)R 1989 should be provided to ensure the driver doesn't cross the speed limit
- Any parent/guardian or a teacher may also travel to ensure these safety norms.
- In j&k directions were issued for Installations of cctv camers within bus.
- Many digital apps are being used for efficient transport operations.
- Responsibilities of parents & students are notified clearly.

Parents have to deliver their children to the school bus or the assembly point at the specified time. If there is a delay on their part, parents have to deliver their children to the school, without holding the driver accountable.

Parents should help in training and educating their children on the importance of traffic safety, and how to wait and ride the school bus.

Parents should notify the school administration of any offence or negligence from the driver.

The driver may return the students to the school if no one came to collect them upon returning at home, under the responsibility of the parents.

Students should maintain the bus cleanness and notify the school management or their parents of any offences committed by the driver or students.

In October 2019 first School Transport Safety conference was held in Asia Singapore. **The conference objective was to co-create sustainable, actionable solutions to protect children on their journey to and from school.** As the lead organizer of this conference, I very much wanted to drive the discussion from grassroots level (individual schools, parents associations) up to operators and government regulators.

ROAD SAFETY IS EVERYONES RESPONSIBILITY:

References:

1. <https://www.jkbose.nic.in>.
2. <https://dsel.education.gov.in>.
3. <https://www.schooltransportmanagement.com>.

