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ROAD HORROR DEATH TOLL

TRAGIC WASTE OF YOUNG LIVES

BY **DANNY DE VAAL**

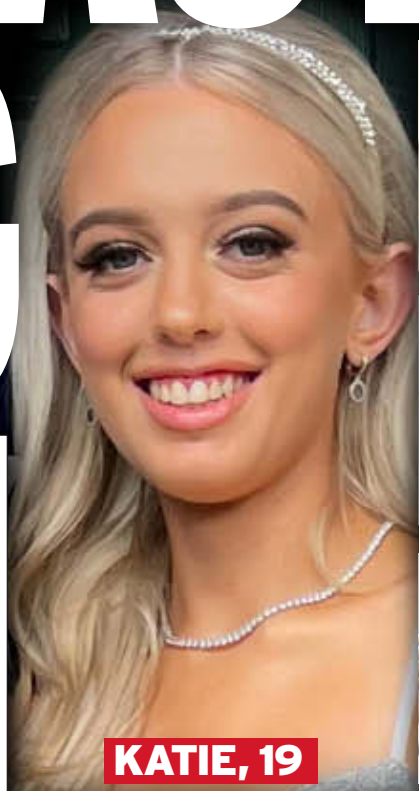
A THIRD of those killed on the roads since the start of the year have been under 25.

A shocking 47 people died between January 1 and March 22 – and 30% were aged between 16 and 25.

These included Carlow pals Daryl Culbert, 21, Michael Kelly, 25, and Katie Graham, 19. Tipperary teen Leah O'Meara, 15, was also killed in a crash.

Roads Policing Bureau Chief Supt Jane Humphries said: "Young people are in a very high-risk category ... for them to lose their life is such a tragedy."

FULL STORY: PAGES 4&5



KATIE, 19



MICHAEL, 25



DARYL, 21



LEAH, 15

ONE THIRD of 47 killed since start of 2024 in teens or early 20s

ROAD HORROR TOLL: FIGURES SHOW 47 KILLED SINCE START OF 2024



BIG SMILES Una, Saoirse & Ciara

N17 car smash sisters 'really lit up the room'

BY DANNY DE VAAL

THE two sisters killed in Tuesday's horrific smash had smiles which "really lit up the room", a member of their local rugby club said yesterday.

Ciara Bowden, 14, and her sister Saoirse, nine, died along with their mum Una, 47, when the car they were travelling in collided with a truck on the N17 near Claremorris, Co Mayo.

The family had been living in the Moycullen area of Co Galway where they were involved in a number of local sports organisations.

Both Ciara and Saoirse were former players with Oughterard Rugby Club while Una volunteered in providing IT assistance to the organisation.

Speaking to RTE's Morning Ireland, Oughterard Rugby Club PRO Julie Ann Brown said: "We are all devastated in Oughterard Rugby and in the wider community.

"They were very quiet girls, yet they had this beautiful energy about them and their smiles really lit up the rooms and the playing fields and every photo we have of them through the Oughterard girls' rugby is of them smiling."

Maigh Cuilinn Parish Priest Fr Martin Whelan said that the community has been left "so devastated".

More tragedy as man, 24, dies

A 24-YEAR-OLD man has died following a horrific collision between a car and a lorry.

The smash took place on the N61 Athlone Road at Newtown in Co Roscommon shortly before 10pm on Wednesday night.

The victim, who was driving the car, was rushed to Portlincula University Hospital in Ballinasloe but was later pronounced dead.

Fianna Fail Cllr John Keogh said: "The whole community is shocked and saddened by the tragic road traffic accident and the resultant loss of life.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of the young man who passed away and also with the other driver, who is undoubtedly very traumatised."

EXCLUSIVE BY DANNY DE VAAL

ALMOST one in three people killed on Irish roads this year were aged between 16 and 25.

Figures released by the Road Safety Authority show from January 1 until March 22, 47 road users died, with 30% of those in their teens or early 20s.

More than a quarter of fatalities fell into this age bracket in 2023 which was up from 16% in 2022.

In January, the country was once again left devastated when friends Daryl Culbert, 21, Michael Kelly, 25, and 19-year-old Katie Graham were killed after crashing into a tree in Carlow.

Less than two weeks after that Leah O'Meara, who was just 15, was killed after a horror smash between two cars near Nenagh in Co Tipperary.

The Irish Mirror asked senior gardai, a hospital consultant and the RSA CEO about the devastatingly high number of fatalities involving young people.

Chief Superintendent Jane Humphries explained: "Young people unfortunately are in a very high-risk category.

"Nobody believes that they're not going to go home that day when they leave that morning.

REALISATION

"I think it needs to be the realisation that when you are young you think you're invincible, that you think it's not going to happen to you, that you don't think you're going to get caught or you're going to have that collision.

"What we have to realise is these collisions are happening to young people, they're happening to young people's peer groups and they have to understand they're not invincible.

"They have to take as much care as anybody else on the roads because for them to lose their life at such a young age is such a tragedy."

When asked specifically if excessive speed or drink and drug driving was to blame, she said: "Sometimes, it can be one or a combination of all.

"And sometimes, it can just simply be human error. But when it's human error and when you are driving slowly and your concentration is on the road, you're more likely to be able to correct that mistake.

"And if you do have a collision, it's going to be less serious."

Professor Conor Deasy, who is an Emergency Medicine Consultant, said many crash victims are often declared dead at the scene while others who are brought to hospital have "unsurvivable injuries" and pass away shortly after they arrive.

The Cork University Hospital doctor said once the news is broken to the parents and partners of victims "life is never the same" for them again.

He told us: "They live with this trauma, this deep sadness, this emptiness, this loss.

"This stays with families for a number of generations.

"Drivers carry precious cargo when they have friends or family in their car. Fellow road users are precious to others.

"The guilt when something goes wrong that drivers live with afterward and the

TRAGIC
LOSSES
Gardai at scene of Carlow crash

47

people died on Ireland's road between January 1 and March 22

30%

of those killed since start of year were in the 16-25 age group

16%

of Irish road fatalities in 2022 were teenagers or in their early 20s



VICTIMS Daryl Culbert, Katie Graham & Michael Kelly died in January

inability to reverse the clock is very cruel."

Prof Deasy said other crash victims end up with brain and spinal injuries which he explained "some would consider as a fate worse than death."

Meanwhile, Independent TD Verona Murphy

said Ireland's road infrastructure has deteriorated and desperately needs to be fixed.

The Wexford deputy, who is the former president of the Irish Road Haulage Association, called for stronger enforcement from the Garda.

She said the Road Safety Authority needs to be more "vocal" when advising the Government on what

needs to be done. Ms Murphy continued: "The state of the roads is a huge feature.

"The reason I say that is I'm someone who is a professional driver, and I drive probably around 80,000 kilometres a year now, which is a lot less than I used to.

"But for young people who don't have that experience year on year, the state of the roads can have a huge impact on their driving.

"When they're learning to drive, they will only hear about aquaplaning but then, when they experience it, it can have a detrimental impact."

She added: "We have so much money, but yet our road infrastructure is worse now than it was 20 years ago

1-IN-3 CRASH VICTIMS ARE YOUNGSTERS

» Gardai say young people in very high-risk category

» Many declared dead at the roadside says surgeon



CAMPAIGN Minister Jack Chambers, cyclist Imogen Cotter, Chief Supt Jane Humphries and Sam Waide



CAUSE Leo Lieghio has called for tougher penalties

particularly in Wexford." The TD said she believes most road deaths are 'preventable' and the impact on rural communities is "much greater than I could even begin to explain".

Ms Murphy said there are too many distractions in cars nowadays, such as mobile phones and car media players, particularly for less experienced drivers.

She also said that students in schools have told her they're not being taught how to drive on rural roads - which is where most crashes involving young people happen - because driving tests take place in built up, urban areas.

RSA CEO Sam Waide said their research had

found some of the reasons young people die on our roads is because of speeding, being distracted, or driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Mr Waide said his organisation has been in contact with Education Minister Norma Foley about enhancing the Transition Year

programme for students around road safety.

The RSA also said data showed that Galway, Tipperary, Cork, Mayo and Dublin saw a high number of collisions involving young drivers.

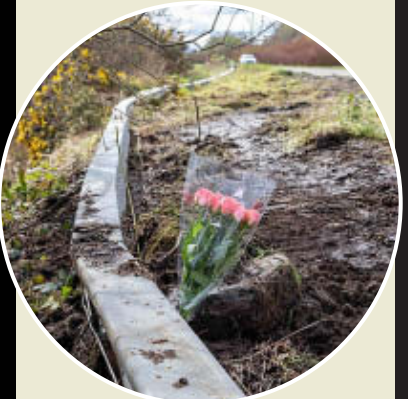
The authority has specifically increased the amount of adverts social media users in those counties will see as a result. Meanwhile, Leo

Lieghio, whose 16-year-old daughter Marsia was killed as she crossed the road in 2005, said he doesn't believe the penalties for dangerous driving go far enough.

He added: "There's a cause, drivers are distracted, or too fast, or seatbelts, there's always something. "It's to do with the legal system. Chances of getting caught are slim and when they do they get a slap on the wrist. There's no real deterrent."

Mr Lieghio, who is also The Irish Road Victims Association's vice-president, said: "All young drivers should have speed limiters put on their cars, and insurance companies should incentivise that."

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TRIBUTE Fatal crash scene

THIRD IN E.U. FOR RURAL DEATHS

BY SEAN MCCARTHAIGH

IRELAND has the third highest level of deaths on rural roads in the EU with more than two-thirds of all fatalities occurring outside built-up areas and motorways.

A new report by the European Transport Safety Council shows 67% of all road deaths in the state between 2020 and 2022 were on rural roads compared to an EU average of 52% over the same period.

Only Finland and Sweden have a higher proportion of all fatalities on rural roads.

The ETSC report also revealed that average speeds on rural roads in Ireland have been increasing in recent years at a time when reductions in average speeds have been observed on similar roads in many other EU member states including France and Austria.

The report showed that around 10,000 people were killed on rural roads excluding motorways in the EU in 2022.

It also highlighted that just 22% of motorists in Ireland were travelling within the speed limit on rural roads with a 50km/h limit in 2022 with the compliance rate increasing to 75% on rural roads with a 100km/h limit.

The ETSC said local and national authorities should also take into account the increasing use of e-bikes in rural areas when planning investment on road safety measures.

ETSC project manager Jenny Carson said rural roads were being made safer with interventions that do not need to be costly.

She said they included road safety audits, analysis and subsequent treatment of high-risk sites, setting and enforcing appropriate speed limits.

Ms Carson added: "It is critically important that policymakers don't forget rural roads are where half of road deaths occur."