SEAT BELT PILOT STUDY, NAMIBIA

Date started: January 2007 **Date finished**: January 2007
Partners: GRSPN and the NRSC
Cost/time/resources: 6,000 USD, 4 weeks

Collecting seat-belt data in different regions of Namibia have showed large variations in seat-belt usage. It seems like seat-belt wearing are more dominant in bigger cities with wearing rates up to 73%. In the more deserted border regions the usage is as low as 14%.

Many of the crashes involving vehicles occur at appropriate speeds but because of the poor restraint and containment of passengers, the injuries are severe. Wearing a seat-belt can reduce the risk of death in a road crash by up to 50% and is one of the most effective measures for preventing injury for vehicle occupants. To increase compliance, better understanding of local behaviour is needed to create targeted effort for both public education and enforcement activities.

Summary project sheet.

Objectives and scope

International evidence shows that low seat-belt compliance relates to higher injury severity. It is also clear that there are potentially large benefits in injury severity reduction if compliance is increased. This study set out to identify wearing rates across Namibia and to assess the need for further knowledge regarding seat-belt behaviour and restraint systems.

Activities

The seat belt compliance study sampled regionally to cover the North, South, East, West and Central regions of Namibia. The survey sample size was constrained by the budget, however, 3.903 vehicles were observed accounting for 2 per cent of the vehicle stock in Namibia. The samples were undertaken mainly during week days since traffic movements at the weekend were lower and around the middle of the day to cover the widest range of seat belt users (child, adult, male, female). Data was divided into drivers and front/back seat passengers.

Conclusion and main lessons learnt

The study indicated that seat-belt wearing varies considerably. Compliance rates vary from 14% to 73%. It would appear that seat-belt wearing is more prevalent near the centre of government (Windhoek) and less common towards the borders. The results suggest that effective seat-belt campaigns must penetrate especially into the border regions.

The study has tentatively indicated the linkage between seat-belt wearing and injury severity in the regions. The best way to determine the relationship between casualties and wearing rates is to obtain the actual wearing behaviour from the victims of crashes over a period of time. This can only be done by the police at crash sites and or possibly at hospitals.

From the study, it is clear there is a need to identify further the quality of vehicle passenger restraint systems and to develop an understanding of the local issues that affect the level of seat-belt wearing. It would be useful to conduct a preliminary survey to understand behaviour and why people are not wearing seatbelts. This data will be useful for deciding the content and direction of a seatbelt strategy with targeted campaigns implemented in close collaboration with police enforcement in the regions.