

ABSTRACT

The Distribution and Determinants of Seat Belt Use in Kingston and St. Andrew

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The consequences of road traffic accidents in Jamaica are of great public health concern. There is a high fatality rate, increasing morbidity and high cost associated with these accidents. In an effort to decrease these outcomes, legislation has been passed that will require mandatory seat belt use as of June 1, 1999.

A cross-sectional study was conducted at 10 randomly selected gas stations in Kingston and St. Andrew to identify the distribution of seat belt use, to assess the knowledge of drivers, their attitude and subjective social norms to seat belt use. Data were collected by observation, questionnaire and focus group discussion.

The observed prevalence of seat belt use among drivers was 16.8%, among front seat passengers 11.1% and among back seat passengers 6.6%. Seat belt use of drivers was significantly associated with gender, category of driver (taxi and private passenger vehicle) and educational level. Knowledge of the benefits of seat belts ($p < 0.01$), subjective social norms ($p < 0.00001$) and attitude towards seat belt use ($p < 0.0001$) significantly influenced seat belt use.

Passengers of drivers who wore seat belts were significantly more likely to wear seat belts than passengers of drivers who did not.

Male drivers were significantly less likely to wear seat belts than female drivers, and had significantly lower subjective social norm score and attitude score.

Compared to private passenger vehicle drivers, taxi drivers were significantly less likely to wear seat belts, and had significantly lower subjective social norm score and attitude score.

The public health implication of the study is the need for the mandating of seat belt use accompanied by effective public education. The study's findings can be used to inform strategies for public and health education programmes. In addition, it may give valuable information to the lawmakers in equitably enforcing the law.