ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GHANA SAFETY POLICY IN ADDRESSING ROAD ACCIDENTS

[1]SAMUEL OPPONG BOAMPONG, [2]ESTHER OPPONG BOAMPONG, [3]FREEMAN ADJEI BREFO

E-mail-oppong214@yahoo.com, [2]ohemaa68@gmail.com

Abstract - Road safety has become a global health concern as thousands of "innocent" lives are lost every year through road accidents. Ghana as a country loses not less than 1.6 percent of its annual GDP through road carnages as breadwinners are lost leaving dependants poorer.
Ghana has over the years adopted a national road policy to help reduce or eliminate road accidents and restore hope on our roads. Between 1999 and 2010, the commission has implemented programmes such as the National Road Safety Strategies (NRST1 & 2) to forestall increasing annual road carnages, but the challenge still persist. It is in light of these developments that a question is raised as to the effectiveness of our road safety policy in addressing accidents especially in Ashanti. A well thought out road safety policy, duly implemented and effectively monitored will do a lot of good in sanitizing our roads.
This study seeks to examine the present state of Ghana's Road Safety policy with regard to the trend of accidents in Ashanti region. It also sought to identify the level of stakeholder knowledge and adherence to National Road Safety policy. It again seeks to find out the capacity of implementing agencies and challenges they face in managing Ghana's Road Safety policy. To achieve the above objectives, the researcher adopted the case study research design which included systematic observations, stratified and quota sampling techniques. The study came out with the following findings; majority of drivers got their training using unapproved methods, implementing agencies, such as the MTTU and DVLA are not well resourced, the attitude of drivers towards pedestrians do not ensure safety on our roads. Seventy (70) questionnaires were administered to the various stakeholders which include; Police MTTU, DVLA, DUR, Ghana Highways authority, Insurance companies, Transport unions, and private drivers. Recommendations if well implemented will be a panacea to help reduce the traffic carnages experienced on our roads and improve road safety, especially in Ashanti.

Keywords - Stakeholders, Safety, Systematic Observation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Road safety is of high priority on the development agenda of the government of Ghana. Good roads are considered a panacea to accelerating economic growth and the attainment of middle-income status country by 2015 (NRSC, 2010).

Ghana as a country has considerable problem with road safety. Road transport is the dominant mode of transport, with considerable number of road traffic crashes that result in fatalities and with estimated cost of about 1.6 % of the country's GDP.

In view of the magnitude of the road traffic crashes and fatalities, the Government of Ghana (GOG) through its accredited agencies such as the National Road Safety Commission (NRSC) and other stakeholders will have to embark on activities to address the road safety challenges of the country.
In respect of this development, the NRSC will have to provide guidelines for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes to be result oriented and proactive with the organization and management of road safety activities to forestall the challenges that are daily experienced on our roads.

II. DEFINITION OF ROAD SAFETY

According to the Cambridge on line Dictionary, Road Safety is defined as "teaching people how to behave safely when driving or crossing the road".

Ghana's National Road Safety Commission has accepted and adopted the definition by the World Health Organization on road safety as "No Accident" (WHO 2004)

In 1997 the Swedish Parliament introduced a "Vision Zero" policy that requires that fatalities and serious injuries are reduced to zero by 2020. Swedish road safety work is based on a refusal to accept human deaths or lifelong suffering as a result of road traffic (Elvik and Amundsen, 2000).

III. COMPONENTS OF ROAD SAFETY POLICY

According to the NRSC, the key road safety challenges in Ghana include high fatality rates, poor driving knowledge, skills and capabilities, poor maintenance of vehicles, inadequate capacity for vehicle inspections, inadequate capacity for traffic safety engineering and poor road traffic enforcement capacity and tactics. In addition, whilst the national vehicle fleet appears to be quite old and poorly maintained, vehicle examination, licensing and driver training are poor. (NRSC, 2007)

Road traffic injury prevention must be incorporated into a broad range of activities, such as the development and management of road infrastructure, the provision of safer vehicles, law enforcement, mobility planning, and the provision of health and

hospital services, child welfare services, and urban and environmental planning. (Peden M. et al, 2004)

IV. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key among Ghana's national road safety policy for the promotion of effective and/or acceptable road practice are as listed below;

- Undertake nationwide road safety education.
- Encourage the development of road safety education as part of the curriculum and the training of trainers in road safety.
- Act in liaison and co-operation with government agencies, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority and other such bodies as it may determine to promote road safety.
- Establish with the road authorities, procedures for safety audit of projects for road construction, reconstruction or improvement.

The research showcased four main components that are aligned to the question of road safety. These are: training related concerns, drivers' attitude, infrastructural support for implementing agencies, and funding from central governmental and proper application of the law in the face of offense.

1) Training related issues.

Status	Number	%
As Driver's mate *	12	32
From friend/family member *	6	16
Driving school	11	28
Self-taught *	9	24
Total	38	100

Table 1.0 Mode of training

In table 1.0 for instance, majority of respondents (i.e. 72%) interviewed received training through unapproved means i.e., through a friend, as driver's mate or self-taught. This development is in no way positive to quality road practice that must lead to safety on our roads in the country. This is a huge percentage and will heavily impact negatively on road safety. There is the likelihood of such drivers missing basic operational instructions and thereby endangering other road users.

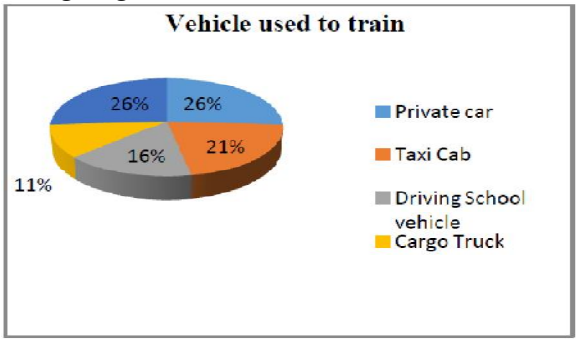


Figure 1.0

Another significant training lapse is the fact that, many of those interviewed trained with particular type of vehicles but use different vehicles to ply their trade. These discrepancies pose serious challenge on our roads. According to the, (1999) road traffic amendment regulations (L.I. 1663) clause 4, section C states that, "the applicant *of a drivers licence* shall satisfy the examiner that the applicant has sufficient knowledge of the Highway Code in respect of-the control of a motor vehicle of the class to which the application is related".

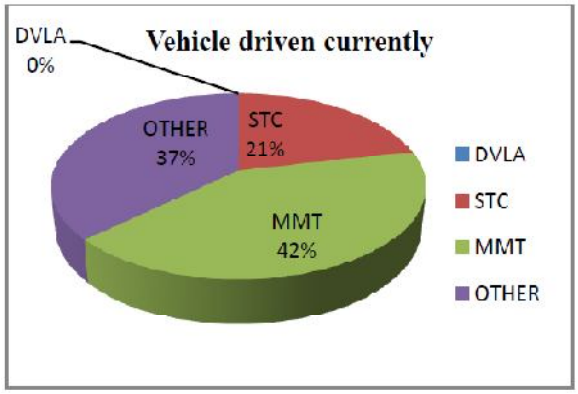


Figure 1.1 Type of vehicle currently use

Training provides the opportunity to acquire job-related skills, improved attitude and knowledge. In table 4.12, it was observed that it takes more than a year for 62% of respondents to receive needed training on road safety from either the DVLA or NRSC.

1) Drivers' attitude.

Observation by the researcher with regard to the attitude of drivers at zebra crossing have it that, drivers are either ignorant of what to do at crossings or disrespectful of pedestrian rights. Only one out of about twenty drivers follows the right procedure of allowing the pedestrians to cross when at the zebra crossing markings. It will be suicidal if pedestrians who are determined to cross the road are not respected by the drivers who are expected to observe the procedure for road signs.

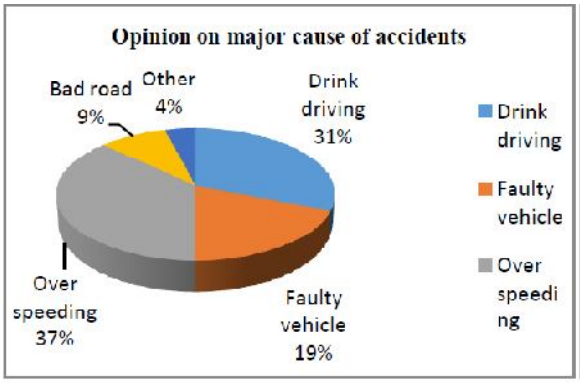


Figure 1.2

Figure 1.2 shows 68% of causes of road accidents are human error (i.e. drink driving and over speeding), which are both avoidable.

1) Infrastructural support for implementing agencies

The issues of capacity and infrastructural support for implementing agencies raise some eyebrows as there is indication that the public do not have adequate access to a dedicated telephone to contact and keep agencies informed of sub-standard driving on our roads. Even in case of getting access, respondents in table 4.21 assert that, the cost of 80% of such calls has to be borne either by the caller or service provider.

Do you have adequate infrastructure for vehicle inspection?	Number	%
Yes	0	0
No	12	100
Total	12	100

Table 1.1 Infrastructure for inspection

It is startling to realise that 100% respondents of those agencies that are mandated to carry out inspection of vehicles in table 1.11 assert that, they do not have enough infrastructures to undertake effective inspection on vehicles to ensure safety on our roads.The table gives a shocking revelation as the total percentage acclaim they do not have adequate infrastructure for their role assigned them to ensure discipline on the road. Inadequate infrastructure will automatically reduce effective monitoring. It is therefore not surprising that a lot of vehicles break up on the roads leading to some accidents.

2) Funding from central government, and proper application of the law in the face of offense.

Ghana's highways lack appropriate and designated rest stops. Many of the drivers interviewed work more hours non-stop and without rest. This sets in fatigue and dizziness, especially for those embarking on long journeys. There is also non-availability of parking spaces for broken down vehicles on our highways. This poses a serious challenge to night driving coupled with our narrow nature of roads.

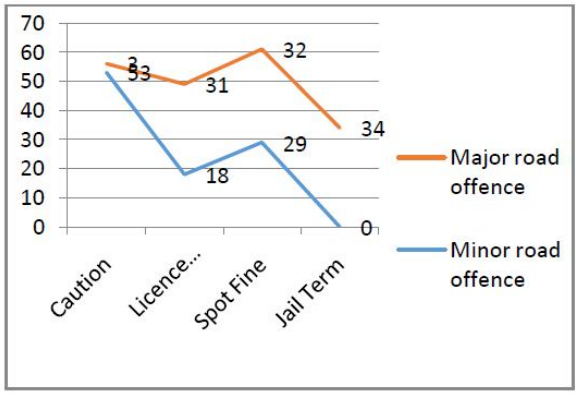


Fig 1.3 Penalty for major/minor road offences

Only 34% of respondents have received a jail sentence of not more than one month imprisonment. This is not deterrent enough to forestall the numerous road carnages experienced in the country.

CONCLUSION

The above findings have shown that the operations of Ghana's road safety policy in the Ashanti region are constrained to a large extent. Therefore, there is the need to review the prevailing practices with respect to provision of infrastructural support to implementing agencies like D.V.L.A, M.T.T.U, e.t c. to enable them deliver as expected. Moreover, the knowledge and skills of various identifiable stakeholders like drivers, transport unions, pedestrians, etc. as well as the capacity of implementing agencies in the region should equally be upgraded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations when implemented will go a long way to deal with the short comings identified on the effectiveness of Ghana's road safety policy in addressing accidents in Ashanti region.

Resources for road safety implementation.

Implementing agencies, especially, Police M.T.T.U and D.V.L.A that play core supervisory role in road safety must be provided with adequate resources, infrastructure support, and needed equipment to fully carry out effective monitoring and play its watch-dog role as expected.

National training institute and road safety education

A National and identifiable institution must be established and mandated to provide an up-to-date training for the driver every two years interval. This national exercise will help to update drivers on new developments in the road transport industry and be conversant with improved technologies and best practices.

Equally important must be pre-announced regular and effective road safety education to the general public. By so doing, the attention of major stakeholders would be captured and adequate efforts made to reach the intended audience.

National driver and vehicle data base

There should be efforts to establish a national data-base and records of drivers, vehicles which can be reviewed and updated periodically. This will for instance provide information on offending or suspended drivers whose licences have been withdrawn or prosecuted for major driving offences to bring sanity in the industry. In this connection, specific sanctions for specific offences must be clearly stated and made known to all stakeholders as

a measure of streamlining punishments and to equally serve as deterrent to all who patronise our road networks.

Regular road maintenance

The agency responsible for road maintenance must be encouraged to carry out regular works on our roads to forestall road-induced accidents. For example faded road markings must be re-painted to serve the purpose for which they are made. This will help improve night driving and also aid road users who use such roads for the first time. Equally significant is the fact that, agencies for construction and/or maintenance and inspection must be independent of each other to assure proper checks and monitoring for quality service delivery.

Rest stops and packing lots.

There should be establishment of more and high patronage of rest stops especially on highways to help reduce fatigue and revitalise both drivers and travellers commuting such long journeys. This will help minimise accidents incidental to over speeding, fatigue and haste. In addition, efforts should be made by implementing agencies to ensure that broken down and parked vehicles on roads or unauthorised places are towed to help prevent accidents.

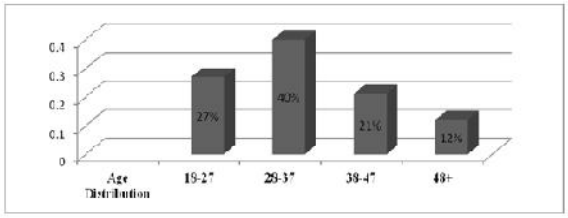
Law enforcement

There must be effectual investigations on every road accident and acceptable penalty applied in time.Road offences must be met with punitive measures to deter others from indulging in similar offences.

SEX	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE %
Male	54	81
Female	13	19
total	67	100

Source: Field data April 2012
Table 1.2 Sex Distributions

The female respondents represents (19%) with (81%) being males. Respondents from formal institutions as well as implementing agencies contributed the (19%) of the female respondents as driving, especially in Ashanti, is male dominated.



Source: Field data April 2012
Fig 1.4 Age Distribution

Eighty eight percent (88%) of the respondents are between 18-47 years. This age bracket is considered very active with much of youthful exuberance.This bracket is also the active working class of the economy that contributes immensely in feeding their expected dependants as well as contributing to the growth of the economy. Losing such important working class through road accidents grievously affects the development of the economy.

ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

BAC	Blood Alcohol Concentration
BRRI	Building and Road Research Institute
DALYs	Disability Adjusted Life Years
DoT	Department of Transport
DUR	Department of Urban Roads
DVLA	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOG	Government of Ghana
MTTD	Motor Traffic and Transport Department
NRSC	National Road Safety Commission
NRSS	National Road Safety Strategy
TRP	Transport Rehabilitation Project
WHO	World Health Organization

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