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Seat belt intervention shows many lives can be saved on China's roads

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China accounts for around 15% of the world's total number of deaths from traffic accidents each year. Motor vehicle production has tripled since the 1990s and despite the availability of seat belts in almost all passenger cars in China and laws requiring restraint use, the habitual use of seat belts is low. With the human toll alone from road traffic injuries in China around 100,000 deaths per year, there is an urgency to implement such interventions in the major cities.

Lead investigator at The George Institute for International Health, Professor Mark Stevenson says, "Research indicates that the risk of death is reduced by up to 60% in drivers using seat belts compared with those not using a seat belt. Prior to the intervention, around half of all drivers/passengers in Guangzhou used seat belts. Our study shows that, since implementation of the intervention, 62% of drivers and passengers in Guangzhou are wearing a seat belt (with an even greater improvement among taxi drivers - more than 20% increase in seat belt use). This translates into the equivalent of 530 Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) saved as a result of the intervention."

The seat belt intervention utilised a novel blend of scientific expertise with practical approaches including enhanced law-enforcement practices, extensive social marketing and health education. According to Mr. Wu Guanghui of Guangzhou Municipal Bureau of Public Security, "Activities to increase seat belt use, awareness and compliance have been implemented with great success. We accomplished significant improvements in Guangzhou city with seat belt law enforcement training

for traffic officers in conjunction with the intensive enforcement program. The results have shown that enhanced police enforcement and road safety communication strategies contributed to raising the prevalence of seat belt use in the city and reducing road traffic injuries.

World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in China, Dr Henk Bekedam noted that the results of the intervention set a good example for other cities in China. "Interventions such as this can save lives. Preventing road injury requires a sustained cross-sectoral effort and the China Seatbelt Intervention has been successful in bringing together a range of important Government, community and private sector partners committed to reducing death and injury on China's roads. WHO is proud to have been part of this effort. The next challenge is replicating these great results around China."

Dr. Zhang Li from the China Ministry of Health said, “Raising the use of seat belts will significantly reduce road traffic deaths and injuries. We are extremely pleased with the outcome of this project which involved strong collaborations of government, scientists, and industry.”

Dr. Gary Dirks, Group Vice President and President for BP China added, “We are proud to have contributed to the project that provided the opportunity for government, researchers and industry to work together to build capacity in road safety and at the same time make joint effort to raise public awareness on seat belts.”

Source: Research Australia

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