
Assessment of the use of deterrence doctrine in the detection and adjudication of road traffic law violations in Ghana

James Damsere-Derry^{1*}, Zakari Abdul Karim Awini¹

*Lead presenter: jdamserederry@yahoo.com. ¹ CSIR-Building & Road Research Institute, UPO Box 40, Kumasi, Ghana

Keywords: human factors, motorists' behaviour, traffic law violation, deterrence, enforcement,

Background: Human factors are the leading cause of road traffic crashes. Consequently, rules and regulations have been enacted to govern motorists' behavior. Enforcement of the traffic laws brings about deterrence and compliance. Ghana has traffic rules and regulations. Periodically, the police enforce these traffic laws. However, we do not know whether the process of enforcement and adjudication on traffic violations is adducing the requisite deterrence. Therefore, the objective of the study was to appraise the application of deterrence doctrine i.e., perceived certainty, celerity, and severity in the detection and adjudication of traffic law violations in Ghana. **Method:** Closed files of motor traffic violation proceedings from Ejisu and Juaben courts were analyzed. Celerity was measured by the duration from detection for traffic violation to first court appearance and final day of adjudication. Punishment severity was measured by the number of penalty units or the duration of imprisonment meted out to motor traffic law violators. Perceived certainty was measured by the frequency, severity and swiftness that key performance indicators of road crashes were detected and prosecuted. **Results:** 292 motorists were presented to the court between 2010 and 2018, with 99.7% being male. 73% were guilty, and fines were the predominant punishment. The mean fine was 92.8 penalty units (GhC 1,114). Imprisonment was rarely used. The time lapse between detection and the first court appearance was approximately 6 months. Dangerous driving, parking violation, unlicensed driving, and careless driving together constituted over 90% of all the traffic violations for which motorists were sent to court. Surprisingly, violation of key performance indicators of road safety like speeding, impaired driving, mobile phone use, seatbelt non-use and helmet non-use which literature indicate that they are prevalent in Ghana were not detected and sent to court. **Conclusion:** Punishment severity was negatively affected by the magnitude of penalty unit. Celerity was negatively affected by the time lag between detection and the first court appearance. Overall, the study highlights the need for a more effective and efficient enforcement and adjudication system to achieve deterrence and reduce road traffic crashes in Ghana. The study recommends;

- prioritizing the enforcement of key performance indicators of road safety
- streamlining the detection and adjudication of non-injury-related traffic violations, and reconsidering court-imposed punishments.
- Additionally, the study suggests that alternative punishment methods, such as community service, could be explored.