

TITLE: ENHANCING AWARENESS OF CAR SAFETY FEATURES THROUGH FACE-TO-FACE WORKSHOPS

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BACKGROUND: The World Health Organization estimates that about 1.19 million people die in road crashes every year. Choosing a safer vehicle, and making sure it has the right safety features, can help reduce that number.

Vehicle safety means how well a car protects people before, during, and after a crash. It is also a good idea to choose a vehicle with a strong independent crash test rating, ideally five stars where available.

This is especially important in Zambia, where road crashes have a serious impact on families and communities. More than 3,300 people were killed in road traffic accidents in Zambia in 2021, and road crashes cost the country about USD 965 million each year. Safer vehicles are not only a health issue. They also matter for the country's economy and people's livelihoods.

For drivers, passengers, and families, a safer car can make a life-saving difference. When it comes to purchasing a car, studies have found that price, brand loyalty and product quality are important factors. psychological factors, and sociocultural influences also play significant roles. Other studies have also found that road users in many African countries are aware of traffic risk, but the link between vehicle safety features and crash outcomes is not always well understood.

AIM: The aim of this study was to increase participants awareness of safety features through face-to-face workshops.

METHOD:

Participants

In the focus groups 48 people participated; 12 were female. They were born from 1969 to 2003 with an average age 34 years old.

Procedure

The participants were invited to take part in focus group discussions about their choice of vehicle purchases. Each session lasted approximately one hour. In total, eight focus groups were conducted, with around six participants in each group and two facilitators. After providing consent, all sessions were audio recorded

The sessions began with questions about participants' own cars and what influenced their choices. They were then asked to elaborate on why these factors were important. If safety features were not mentioned, participants were prompted to discuss them and explain what safety meant to them. Seat belts in the back were also discussed, starting with participants' own views, followed by a short film illustrating what would happen to a driver and passenger if they were not wearing seat belts.

The second part of the session discussed safety features and Euro NCAP. A film was shown comparing a secondhand car made in Europe with a high star rating and the same car, but new, made in South Africa. The crash test demonstrated that the second-hand car performed much better. Participants were then introduced to the rating systems used by Euro NCAP. The sessions concluded with participants' reflections on the discussion.

Questionnaire

A survey was administered to participants upon arrival, prior to the start of the session. At the end of the session, a second survey was distributed and completed by the participants.

The pre-session survey included items measuring 11 different aspects that might be important when purchasing a car (e.g., style and design, ease of access, availability of spare parts, seat belts in the back and airbags). These items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = Not important at all, 7 = Very important). Participants were then asked to select the three aspects they considered most important.

The survey concluded with questions about participants' favourite car brand and the reasons for their preference. Additional questions gathered information about their current car and whether it was imported. This was followed by two questions assessing how frequently they drive in urban and rural areas. Finally, demographic information, including age and gender, was collected.

The post-session survey included the same questions as the pre-session survey. However, as Euro NCAP was discussed during the focus group, additional questions relating to this were incorporated. Participants were asked to rate the usefulness of Euro NCAP and to assess whether it would be feasible to introduce such a system in Africa.

They were also asked whether, the next time they purchase a car, they would consider the car's safety rating. Response options were "Yes," "Not sure," and "No."

The survey concluded with an open-ended question inviting participants to share their comments on safe cars and their reflections on the focus group discussion.

RESULTS: The results showed that participants rated safety-related items as more important in the post-session survey than in the pre-session survey. All changes were statistically significant at the .001 level. Specifically, participants considered rear seat belt use, airbags, durability, visibility and vehicle structure to be more important after the session than before. In contrast, factors such as design, ease of access to parts, cost, fuel consumption, ease of access and availability of spare parts were rated as less important in the post-session survey.

When asked to identify the most important feature, respondents in the pre-survey prioritized spare parts and durability, while the same respondents in the post-survey emphasized rear seat belts and cost. The number of participants selecting rear seat belts as the most important feature increased from 7 to 24, while the corresponding figure for airbags rose from 15 to 28.

All participants indicated that they found NCAP to be very useful and reported that they would consult car safety ratings the next time they purchased a vehicle. Participants' comments were highly positive, including statements such as: "The discussion has raised my curiosity about car safety," "It was insightful to learn about knowing the manufacturer," "It is important to consider the safety of the car through the ratings," and "This session has been an eye-opener for my car purchase plans."

CONCLUSION: The findings suggest that a one-hour focus group discussion including some short films can enhance participants awareness of car safety features.