

**Seatbelt Use as an Environmental Health Issue
among the Youth of the State of Qatar**

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The relationship of the environment to human health has long been a focus of many a nation's mission and research agenda aimed at promoting and maintaining a safe environment that prevents injury and promotes healthy living habits, enabling children to reach adulthood healthy and free of disability. Progress has been made worldwide in many areas, including the wearing of seatbelts and other safety devices thereby preventing serious injuries among citizens, especially the youth. Nonetheless, much more remains to be done, more particularly in the Gulf Region, with special emphasis on the State of Qatar.

In a recent retrospective case-control study by Munk and his colleagues (2008) to determine the rate of seatbelt use among the Qatari population, and the relationship between seatbelt use and the likelihood of sustaining severe injury or rapid death when involved in a road traffic crash (RTC), the findings showed that seatbelt use was universally poor; only 33% of the RTC victims were wearing seatbelt at the time of their crash. This contrasted with a study by Bener and associates (2007) which found that safety belt use had increased from 8% in 2001 to 67% in 2004 among patients admitted to hospital with injury after RTCs, following the promulgation of a seatbelt law in Qatar in January 2002. Munk and colleagues further found that the model RTC victim was a male, Qatari, 27 years of age, who lived in a rural area, hardly wore a seatbelt, drove at a high speed; had a rollover, and sustained severe injury or death. The investigators concluded that seatbelts are significantly protective; and significant morbidity and mortality is preventable by the consistent use of seatbelts. Recommendations included defensive driver education programs; ongoing public awareness programs in schools, social and public health care arenas; ongoing enforcement of national regulations and laws, and most importantly parental responsibility and commitment – implying that quality of life, after all, is dependent upon a protective environment fostered by a positive parental role modeling that in turn promotes positive attitude formation toward seatbelt use among the youth of the future generation of Qatar.

References

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