

Executive Summary February 2024:

Assessing Compliance with the Child Safety in Motor Vehicles Act in the Republic of the Philippines

Bloomberg Philanthropies Initiative for Global Road Safety

REPUBLIC OF THE
PHILIPPINES



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL
of PUBLIC HEALTH

International
Injury Research Unit

Key Takeaways

Key Findings

1. The Child Safety in Motor Vehicles (CSMV) Act has not been fully implemented yet; subsequently, there is no enforcement of the law and a lack of incentive for the public to comply.
2. Mistrust in the government's intentions, passage of a law without public support, unaffordability of child restraints, limited knowledge of child restraints, and cultural norms have hindered the use of child restraint systems (CRS) among the public.
3. Child restraint use was almost non-existent; 62% of children observed were not in any form of restraint (child seat or seat-belt), 30% were sitting on a passenger's lap, 6% were in a seat-belt, and only 2% were in a car seat.
4. Traveling in a passenger's lap was almost five times more common among children aged under five (62%) compared to children aged between 5-12 years old (13%).
5. Seat-belt use was ten times higher among children seated in the front seat (30%) compared to children seated in the rear seat (3%).
6. The number of CRS observed at physical stores was lower (N=91) compared to CRS being sold online (N=4,334) at the most popular e-commerce sites in Philippines.
7. The mean prices of CRS sold on the online market were remarkably higher (105 USD – 482 USD) than the price in physical stores (7 USD – 260 USD).
8. All the CRS observed in physical stores had product standard indicated by means of a license, certificate, or sticker, whereas only 10% of CRS sold online had product standards indicated
9. The majority (71%) of CRS sold online did not specify dates of manufacture and expiry, while the majority of the CRS observed in physical stores had dates of manufacture (80%) and dates of expiry (31%) indicated.
10. Nearly all the CRS observed in physical stores had minimum and maximum age and weight limits indicated, however maximum height limits were less commonly specified among the CRS observed across both types of stores (physical: minimum and maximum height limit = 20%; online: minimum height limit = 1%, maximum height limit = 3%).

Key Recommendations

Government and Law Enforcement

1. Increase awareness of the Child Safety in Motor Vehicles Act among law enforcement agencies and the public, by:
 - a. Training law enforcement on the CSMV Act and how to implement it,
 - b. Liaising with the Land Transportation Office (LTO) to promote awareness about child restraints among vehicle-owners,
 - c. Coordinating mass media campaigns for the public which advocate for child restraint use, promote the benefits of child restraint use, and highlight the dangers of seating children in the front seat, in a passenger's lap, or without a child restraint.
2. Enact full implementation of the Child Safety in Motor Vehicles Act after:
 - a. Garnering public support and awareness through media campaigns,
 - b. Providing sufficient notice to the public to prepare for implementation,
 - c. Improving affordability of child restraints through financial incentives such as discounts, voucher schemes, or tax exemptions.
3. Upon full implementation of the CSMV Act, coordinate awareness efforts with enhanced enforcement of:
 - a. Child restraint use among children aged 12 years or younger,
 - b. Seat-belt use among children who meet the legal height requirements,
 - c. Banning children aged 12 years or younger from sitting in the front seat if they do not meet the legal height requirements.

Department of Trade and Industry

1. Ensure availability of CRS products across physical and online stores all over Philippines by increasing local production and importing from abroad.
2. Set equitable prices for CRS sold across physical and online stores, and official and unofficial vendors.
3. The Bureau of Philippine Standards must implement adequate quality control regulations for CRS sold in the online market, especially those sold by unofficial vendors in the online market.

Executive Summary

The Johns Hopkins International Injury Research Unit (JH-IIRU), Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the second phase of the Bloomberg Initiative for Global Road Safety (BIGRS) project implemented in 27 cities across 15 low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). BIGRS is a 5-year (2020–2025) project implemented by a consortium of partners with an overall goal to reduce the burden of road traffic injuries and fatalities in selected LMICs. BIGRS collects observational data related to four risk factors that account for the majority of road traffic morbidity and mortality, one which is a lack of child restraints use. One of the mandates of the current phase of BIGRS is to advocate for national road safety legislation, in addition to enhancing data collection and surveillance, changing road user behavior, improving road infrastructure and upgrading vehicle safety.

In 2019, the Government of the Philippines passed Republic Act No. 11229, the Child Safety in Motor Vehicles (CSMV) Act, which prohibits children under 12 from sitting in the front seat of motor vehicles and mandates use of age, weight, and height appropriate child restraint systems (CRS) for all children under 150 cm or 59 inches in height (Republic Act 11229, 2018). The President of the Republic of Philippines signed the mandate in February 2019 however due to the COVID-19 pandemic, implementation of the act was deferred indefinitely in February 2021 (Cervantes, 2021).

JH-IIRU partnered with the Institute of Health Policy and Development Studies (IHPDS), University of the Philippines Manila to assess compliance with the CSMV Act and study CRS use pre-implementation of the CSMV Act in the Philippines. This study focused on understanding 1) the prevalence of CRS use among children traveling in covered motor vehicles, 2) the accessibility, affordability and quality of child restraints sold in the Philippines, 3) consumer perspectives about the CSMV Act and CRS use, and 4) the design and implementation of the CSMV Act. This study will help BIGRS partners understand more about one country's experience in working to protect children from road traffic injuries. This technical report summarizes the results from this multi-pronged research study, including recommendations on how to improve CRS use among caregivers in the Philippines.

Child observations: this sub-study was conducted to assess compliance with sections 4 and 5 of the CSMV Act, which 1) mandate the use of CRS in all covered, moving motor vehicles, and 2) prohibits children aged 12 years or below from sitting in the front seat of a moving vehicle. Between August to October 2022, 18,273 child observations were conducted across 63 sites in Manila, Pasay, and Quezon City. Sites observed includes parks, restaurants, places of worship, shopping malls, schools, and hospitals, where children are most likely to frequent.

Child restraint use was poor across all cities; 62% were not in a child seat or seat-belt, 30% were sitting on a passenger's lap, 6% were in a seat-belt, and 2% were in a child seat. The use of seat-belts was higher among children seated in the front seat compared to the rear seat; 30% versus 3%, respectively. Across age groups, it was more common for children aged under five (62%) to be seated on a passenger's lap compared to children aged 5–12 years old (13%).

Market observations: this sub-study was conducted to evaluate the affordability, accessibility and quality of

child restraints sold in the Philippines. CRS were observed in (a) physical stores in Manila, Pasay, and Quezon City and (b) the most popular e-commerce sites in the Philippines. The number of CRS observed in physical stores was limited (N=91) however a large number of CRS were being sold online (N=4,334). The mean prices of CRS sold in physical stores ranged from 7 USD to 260 USD, while those sold online were remarkably higher (105 USD to 482 USD). The majority (90%) of the CRS were being sold online by unofficial vendors, at prices lower than those offered by official vendors (mean price [official]: 1,359 USD; mean price [unofficial]: 122 USD).

The demand for new CRS was higher compared to secondhand ones, when comparing number of units sold (31,953 vs. 21), although prices of new CRS in online stores were higher (mean price: 285 USD) compared to secondhand ones (mean price: 86 USD). All the CRS observed in physical stores had product standards¹ indicated, while only 10% of CRS observed online had product standards. While 80% of all the CRS observed in physical stores had dates of manufacture, and 31% mentioned dates of expiry, majority (71%) of the CRS observed online did not specify dates of manufacture and expiry. While nearly all of the CRS observed in physical stores had minimum and maximum age and weight limits, 61% of the CRS sold in online stores specified minimum age limit, 66% mentioned maximum age limits, 38% mentioned minimum weight limits and 46% mentioned maximum weight limits. Minimum and maximum height limits were less commonly specified among the CRS observed across both types of stores (physical, minimum and maximum height limit: 20%; online, minimum height limit: 1%, maximum height limit: 3%).

Focus group discussions: this sub-study was conducted to understand perceptions surrounding CRS, including accessibility, affordability, and quality and awareness about the CSMV Act, among caregivers and drivers of children 12 years old or younger who use cars as a means of transport in Pasay, Manila, and Quezon City. Between July and August 2022, six focus group discussions were conducted with 54 caregivers. Despite awareness of the law, caregivers were unmotivated and unable to use child restraint systems due to lack of implementation of the law and unaffordability of CRS. Child restraint systems were identified as a token of a family belonging to a higher socio-economic status, and caregivers suggested that the government improve affordability of CRS and increase awareness of the CSMV Act and CRS use by highlighting the importance of CRS use and promoting CRS use among caregivers.

Policy implementation and case studies: this sub-study was conducted to understand how the CSMV Act was designed and its implementation. Between April and July 2021, 27 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with multi-sectoral stakeholders involved in the policy design and policy implementation of the CSMV Act. The policy design and implementation case studies demonstrated that the law was passed without public support during a financially-sensitive time (during the COVID-19 pandemic when restrictions prevented children from leaving the house and families were experiencing heightened financial difficulties). Despite CRS and road safety advocate's efforts to frame the CRS mandate as a public health issue which was enacted to protect parents from the high costs of child road safety injuries; the cultural belief that a mother's arms is safer than a CRS, and the mistrust of the public in the government's motive in enacting this law for the good of its citizens, public support for the law was poor.

¹ In this study, presence of any of the following was considered as an indicator of product standard: Philippines standard mark license; Import Clearance Certificate (ICC); European Union (EU), Canada, Australian and/or United States (US) standards or any other international product standards.

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