

Pedestrians in Ghana are risking their lives—we studied what's distracting them while walking

July 27 2023, by Prince Kwame Odame and Enoch F Sam



Walking is a popular mode of transportation in Ghana. Credit: Wikimedia Commons/Linda Fletcher Dabo

Walking has health and environmental benefits—but it's not always a person's choice for getting around. And it does come with hazards. [One fifth](#) of the people killed on the roads globally are pedestrians.

In Ghana, like other developing countries, walking is the main mode of travel. A 2012 survey found that [64.4%](#) of the workforce went to work on foot.

Ghana's [National Road Safety Authority reported](#) 2,930 [pedestrians](#) were knocked down in 2021 and 831 died.

Pedestrians are vulnerable for several reasons. The design of road infrastructure is one. [Research](#) has shown that the absence of sidewalks forces pedestrians into the road, exposing them to motorized transport that heightens the risk of traffic crashes and injuries.

Risky in-traffic pedestrian walking behavior is also a factor. Consuming alcohol, chatting with others, and using a [mobile phone](#) all heighten the risk of injuries.

As transport geographers we set out to discover what distracts pedestrians in Accra's main business district. Our [study](#) discovered that the use of mobile devices, poorly designed infrastructure and advanced age all played a role. We suggest the city needs pedestrian friendly infrastructure and local laws to regulate walking behavior.

Digital devices distract pedestrians

We chose to study the central business district of the capital, Accra, since it [accounts](#) for 57.6% of pedestrian accidents within the [Accra Metropolitan Assembly](#). It also records high foot traffic, being a major economic hub in Ghana.

The study engaged 400 commuters. We asked [respondents](#) to rank various activities they commonly engaged in while walking. A five-point scale indicated the extent of their engagement in these activities.

The respondents' top four distracting activities involved using [digital devices](#) like mobile phones. Listening to music on a mobile phone emerged as the major distraction: 79% of respondents ranked it as their most common distractive activity. Making or receiving [phone calls](#) and conversing with other people while walking (2nd and 3rd) followed. Browsing the internet on mobile phones ranked 4th, and was widespread among those aged 9-24 and 27-42.

Who is distracted?

The study also indicated that sex, age, level of education, occupation, reasons for walking and weekly time spent walking were significant predictors of distractions.

Male pedestrians were more than twice as likely to engage in distractive activities. This is consistent with the [expectations](#) of some behavior experts.

On age, the data revealed a significant association between commuters aged 49-59 and distracted walking. A growing body of [literature](#) has identified older people as engaging in distracted walking since they are less likely to estimate their walking environment accurately. Even looking at signage or objects of interest, buying items, or conversing with other pedestrians may increase their risk of injury.

Respondents with senior high school education (nine years of basic education) were also more prone to distraction. Evidence shows that [most](#) Ghanaians end their education at this level. Working in the informal economy as hawkers or in other businesses encroaching on

sidewalks, people are likely to compete with pedestrians for space or run after moving cars to sell their wares.

Relative to respondents who walked only for short trips, respondents who walked as part of their job recorded a far higher likelihood of engaging in distractive behavior. Most of their day is spent walking, engaged in activities like sales or marketing, providing a courier service, or hawking.

Finally, time allocated to walking made a difference to behavior. Whether weekly or daily, respondents who dedicated more time to walking in the CBD were more likely to walk in a distracted way.

Safety plans

Accra already has a [pedestrian safety action plan](#), but it focuses on the built environment rather than on behavior. This study suggested the plan should include a policy statement on pedestrian walking behavior.

The Accra Metropolitan Assembly (the administrative authority) can enact laws restricting pedestrians from listening to music with headphones, making phone calls while crossing roads or engaging in unwarranted conversations.

Additionally, the National Road Safety Authority and Ghana Police Service should collaborate on educational outreach programs on all media platforms. They should focus on the dangers and causes of distractive walking.

Interventions like these offer the chance to reduce [pedestrian](#) injuries in Accra.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative

Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Pedestrians in Ghana are risking their lives—we studied what's distracting them while walking (2023, July 27) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-07-pedestrians-ghana-liveswe-distracting.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.