

1998 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey

Data Preview IV: Motorcycle Use

Following are results from the 1998 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey conducted for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The survey employed 2 questionnaires, each administered by telephone to a national sample of approximately 4,000 randomly selected persons age 16 and older. Interviewing began November 5, 1998, and continued through January 12, 1999. The data are weighted to yield national estimates. Detailed results from the survey will be published later in a series of NHTSA reports.

Driving Or Riding A Motorcycle

Fewer than one in ten persons age 16 and older (8%) said they had driven a motorcycle in the past 12 months. Males (14%) were far more likely than females (2%) to report this activity. Little evidence emerged that motorcyclists were clustered within a single age group as the percentage of motorcyclists was approximately the same among persons in their teens (9%), their 20s (10%), their 30s (10%), or their 40s (11%). While a drop-off occurred among persons in their 50s (5%), driving a motorcycle continued for some to age 60 and beyond (3%).

Seven percent of the public reported riding as a passenger on a motorcycle during the past 12 months. Combined with the drivers above, this means that 13% of the population age 16 and older had driven or ridden as a passenger on a motorcycle in the past 12 months (2% had done both). Unlike driving a motorcycle, riding as a passenger was more likely to be reported by females (9%) than males (6%), and far more likely to be reported by persons under the age of 25 (18%) than 25 and older (5%).

Helmet Use

Among persons who said they had driven a motorcycle in the past year, about two-thirds stated that they wore a helmet either all (60%) or most (8%) of the time. This was about a ten percentage point drop from two years earlier (in both years, there were a total of about 350 motorcyclists in the survey sample). The numbers of motorcyclists were too few to analyze differences in reported helmet use according to whether the state had a helmet law. However, the general pattern was for higher helmet usage in states requiring helmet use by all riders, compared to states with lesser or no requirements.

Among persons who said they had ridden as a passenger on a motorcycle in the past 12 months, 75% indicated that they wore a helmet the last time they rode. As with driving a motorcycle, the data suggested greater use of helmets by passengers in states requiring use by all riders, but was based on too few cases to present any statistics with confidence.

Support For Helmet Laws

Four-fifths (80%) of the public reported that they favored mandatory helmet use laws for motorcyclists. This reflects little difference over the two previous administrations of this survey (see Table on back). Support was more prevalent among females (89%) than males (71%), and among non-motorcyclists (83%) than those who drove motorcycles (47%) with this gap seeming to have widened in the past two years. Support also was higher in states requiring all riders to wear helmets (84%), compared to states having lesser requirements (75%) or no requirements (79%).

Drinking and Driving A Motorcycle

Respondents who had driven a motorcycle in the past year were asked if they had done so after drinking alcoholic beverages over that time period. Few (8%) reported that they had.



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		1998	1996	1994
Have you driven a motorcycle in the past 12 months?	Yes	8%	8%	8%
	No	82%	84%	83%
	Don't Know/Refused	*	*	*
	Non-Driver	10%	8%	9%
If yes: How often do you wear a helmet when you drive a motorcycle?	All Of The Time	60%	70%	67%
	Most Of The Time	8%	8%	11%
	Some Of The Time	5%	5%	7%
	Rarely	5%	7%	5%
	Never	19%	9%	11%
	Don't Know	2%	—	—
	Refused/No Response	1%	—	—
During the past 12 months, have you driven a motorcycle after drinking alcoholic beverages?	Yes	8%	7%	8%
	No	91%	92%	92%
	Don't Know/Refused	*	1%	—
During the past 12 months, have you ridden as a passenger on a motorcycle?	Yes	7%	8%	8%
	No	92%	92%	92%
	Don't Know/Refused	*	*	*
If yes: Did you wear a helmet the last time you rode as a passenger?	Yes	75%	78%	78%
	No	25%	21%	22%
	Don't Know/Refused	1%	1%	—
Do you favor or oppose mandatory helmet use laws for motorcyclists?				
Total Population	Favor	80%	81%	82%
	Oppose	16%	15%	15%
	Don't Know/Refused	4%	4%	4%
Motorcyclists (Drivers)	Favor	47%	56%	54%
	Oppose	48%	42%	43%
	Don't Know/Refused	5%	2%	3%
Non-Motorcyclists	Favor	83%	83%	84%
	Oppose	13%	13%	12%
	Don't Know/Refused	4%	4%	4%

