LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Crash helmets in Bali, Indonesia

EDITOR—The Indonesian island of Bali (population estimated 2.924 million) has introduced a law requiring the use of crash helmets by motorcycle riders and passengers. The law is administered by traffic police attached to administrative regions of the island. The fine for not wearing a helmet is officially 15,000 rupiah ($6.50), although police suffer a bad reputation for extracting whatever they can from traffic offenders.

Motorcycles are the most popular form of transport in Indonesia, with 8135 registrations in 1994 (compared with 1.89 million cars). Since 1975, motorcycle registrations have increased 5.8-fold, while car registrations grew 3.9-fold (data from Indonesian State Police).

In July 1996, with the help of two assistants, I conducted an observational study of helmets use at three locations in Bali. Using a hand held counter, I counted 500 consecutive helmet wearers passing on one side of heavily trafficked two way streets. This procedure was repeated on two occasions in different locations. Drivers and pillon passengers wearing helmets were counted. A second observer simultaneously counted those wearing helmets but who did not have them secured with a strap. A third observer counted those who passed during these observational periods who did not wear a helmet. Results were subsequently cross checked.

A Balinese resident explained to me that the lower rate of helmet use and higher rate of strapless use observed in Ubud would be most likely explained by the later observational time (5pm v 2pm in the other two cases); most traffic police went off duty after 4pm. A large proportion of non-helmet users, particularly in the Denpassar and Baturuban sites, were people dressed to attend religious ceremonies who are presumably exempted from wearing helmets. Small children carried as pillions were invariably helmetless, and often wedged between adults with the result that three, four, and occasionally five people rode the one motorcycle.

While the law requires helmet use, no standards have been set for helmet construction. A cheap helmet in common use resembles a bowl constructed of poor quality plastic; it is easily cracked by slight hand pressure. Clearly, it provides virtually no protection to the wearer. The prevalence of such helmets, together with the common practice of simply perching the helmet on the head with the straps flapping in the breeze, suggests widespread cosmetic adherence to the law.

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CALENDAR

The Third National Violence Prevention Conference will take place in Los Angeles, California 1–4 June 1997. Further details: Anthony D Borbon, Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles, 313 N Figueroa St, Room 127, Los Angeles, CA 90012, USA. Fax +1-213-250-2594.

Consolidating Communities Against Violence (Sixth International Conference on Safe Communities), 15–19 October 1997, Johannesburg, South Africa. Further details: Safe-comm6 Conference Secretariat, Conferences and Promotions, PO Box 411177, Craighill, Johannesburg 2024, South Africa.


Doctoral training in injury prevention

The William Hadden Jr Fellowship in Injury Prevention will provide a $12,000 scholarship to one doctoral candidate admitted to the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in the Department of Health Policy and Management.

Contact: Susan P Baker, MPH (subaker@phnet.sph.jhu.edu) for information about the training program and the scholarship, or call +1 410-955-3543 for admissions information.

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